MEDITATIONS FOR THE LAITY

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MEDITATIONS FOR THE LAITY

FOR EVERYDAY IN THE YEAR

BY

THE REV. ALBERT RUNG

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The Eucharistic Triduum, by Fr. Jules Lintelo, S. J.
Visits to Jesus in the Tabernacle, by the Rev. Francis X. Lasance.
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Boyhood of a Priest, by Armel O'Connor.
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INTRODUCTION

A great aid to spiritual life neither regularly nor systematically employed by the laity is mental prayer. "All prayer is and must be, to some extent, mental; otherwise it cannot be called prayer in any true sense of the word. Both in vocal and mental prayer we are expected to 'raise our minds and thoughts to God.'" But vocal prayer is accompanied by a set form of words, whereas mental prayer is without any fixed form. We may define mental prayer simply as the occupation of the mind with the thought of God and kindred subjects for the purpose of regulating our conduct. St. Francis de Sales defines it as "the prayer of the heart, and particularly that which has for its object the life and passion of our Lord. By making Him the frequent subject of your meditation, your whole soul will be replenished with Him; you will imbibe His spirit, and frame all your actions according to the model of His."

The purpose of meditation is to set the heart on fire with the love of God, and loving Him, to regulate our conduct to please Him. St. Teresa says: "He who can use his intellect in the way of meditation on what he is, on what he owes to God, on the great sufferings of God for him, his own scanty service in return, and on the rewards God reserves for those who love Him, learns how to defend himself against his own thoughts and against the dangers and perils of sin."

Mental prayer engages the understanding and the will. The understanding is to be enlightened and the will moved to do good and to shun evil. While reflecting on holy subjects, the understanding is enlightened by deductions and

conclusions effected by the grace of God. The will is strengthened by motives of the love of God, or of the beauty of virtue, or of a hatred of sin, engendered by the thoughts occupying the mind during the meditation. St. Francis de Sales beautifully explains this process thus: "Prayer places our understanding in the brightness and light of God, and exposes our wills to the heat of heavenly love. There is nothing that purges our understanding of its ignorance, or our will from its depraved affections, as prayer. It is the water of benediction, which makes the plants of our good desires green and flourish, which washes our souls of its imperfections, and quenches the thirst of passion in our hearts."

The methods of meditating are various. The following is suggested as a simple way, especially for beginners. If possible make the meditation in the morning, "when the mind will be less distracted, and more fresh after the repose of the night." The time to be allotted for meditation must depend on the good will and duties of the individual. Five, ten or fifteen minutes each day would be productive of much good. Having resolved upon the time to be devoted to meditation, this period of time ought to be devoted regularly each day for this purpose, and should be neither prolonged nor shortened without good reason. If despite our good will our thoughts will not flow, we may at least spend the time on our knees as a means of mortification, which will not go unrewarded. This act of penance will often bring a flood of light for the understanding and power for the will, if not during the meditation itself, then often at other times during the day. Having read the matter for meditation the night before, or if preferred immediately before the meditation, first say a preparatory prayer. St. Ignatius, the master of meditations, used the following: "O Lord, my God, give me grace that all my intentions, actions and opera-

tions may be ordered purely to the service and praise of thy divine majesty," or some other short prayer, as the Hail Mary, said with the intention expressed in the Ignatian prayer, may be substituted. Next, if the subject matter allows, a picture of the incident or scene of the meditation should be formed in the mind, in order to fix the attention on the matter in hand and to enable the mind to concentrate on the subject to be considered and to prevent our thoughts from sauntering off on other topics. In almost every meditation we can picture ourselves kneeling beside our blessed Saviour and imagine Him telling us the truths we wish to meditate on, and in spirit hear Him tell us the desires of His Sacred Heart in our regard. At other times we may kneel before Him nailed on the cross. After we have formed this picture we think of what we have read, ruminating on these thoughts and striving to find how they concern us, how they practically bear upon our lives and our future. How we ought to love God, what good we ought to do, what evil we ought to shun, will naturally suggest themselves. Then we must formulate our finding into a resolve, for this is the precious fruit of meditation. Now it is well to turn to God, to show Him our resolve, to ask Him to bless it and give us strength to carry it out; and thus the meditation may end. The resolution, however, should be borne in mind as much as possible all during the day. The meditation will resolve itself into these stages:

1) Preparatory prayer.
2) A mental picture to fix the attention.
3) Reflection on the matter read.
4) A good resolution.
5) Intimate converse with Jesus.

In reference to this mechanical structure of a meditation, Father James Keatinge, an eminent author on spiritual topics, says: "The mechanical structure is a real help to

almost every man teaching himself how to meditate. We are apt not to like it, because it means work, not a vague sauntering through a half hour. It makes our efforts definite, and has the merit of fixing our fleeting imaginings on some special point. As we grow older, this mechanical structure tends to drop to pieces, and we let it go. It has served its purpose. It is a scaffolding and has its uses while we are putting up the walls, but it is not the building itself, and we must ever remember that it is a means, not an end. The object of this intellectual exercise is to set the will on fire with the love of God. As soon as we catch fire, the meditation is a success. . . . Hence my conclusion is that we may well use that mechanical structure so long as it helps us, but we must remember that the success of our meditation will always consist in the will catching fire and not in intellectual acts. 'My heart grew warm within me: and in my meditation a fire shall flame out.' (Ps. XXXVIII, 4)."

The advantage of mental prayer for those who strive after an interior life is at once evident. Man is of the earth, earthy; his thoughts, desires, aims, and actions, when left to himself, are all based on natural motives. To raise man's ideals to a higher plane is the work of meditation. Many of the exactions of a spiritual life are considered foolhardy by the children of the world. Mental prayer shows the advantage of seeming the fool for Christ's sake, which in reality is following a wisdom which the world cannot understand. Moreover, meditation creates a supernatural atmosphere for us to live in. We necessarily live in an atmosphere of worldliness. Now to live in the world and yet not be of the world, it is necessary to gain a mental environment that is supernatural. By meditation we surround our minds with thoughts, desires, and motives different from those which naturally suggest themselves, and by perseverance in this practice such a mental attitude becomes the prevailing state

of our minds, thus making it easier to pray, to do works of mortification, and to give alms, which are the essentials of Christian perfection.

One of the reasons why so few of the laity meditate is because of the want of a suitable meditation book. There are many such books for priests and religious, but only a few, if any, for the laity. The author offers these humble efforts as a help to those who wish to gain the invaluable fruits of meditation. The subject matter is based on the book, "Introduction to a Devout Life," by St. Francis of Sales, which His Holiness Pope Pius XI says is the most perfect book of its kind and proves that sanctity is reconcilable with any state of life. All quotations in the text up to June 30 are taken from this book, unless otherwise noted. The meditations for July, August, September, October, November, and December are based on *The Following of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, a book held by spiritual guides as second only to the Holy Bible Itself. It is read by Catholics and Protestants alike. For many it has been the source of their religious life. Many have made of it a constant companion and allow no day to pass without a short reading of its contents. Others find in it an aid in every contingency of life. More good has been effected through it than may be recorded by any human agency. How many saints have been formed by its wise and kindly suggestions will never be known in this world. Men have found in it consolation and encouragement where every other human means had failed. Many resort to it in every difficulty and temptation in life and find that it supplies just the aid they need in these trying circumstances.

I intend briefly to outline a meditation for each day, which may be worked out by the one meditating in a manner similar to what St. Ignatius suggests in the following excerpt from his book of Spiritual Exercises:

"If you have to meditate on the sin of the angels, you will call to mind how they, having disobeyed their Creator, forfeited grace and were cast out of Heaven into hell. You will then reflect attentively on this subject, so as to feel confounded by and blush at the multitude of your sins, compared to this one single sin which ruined the rebel angels. In fine you will conclude that you have often merited the same punishment as they, since you have so often sinned." A resolution is then in order faithfully to avoid every mortal sin and a prayer to beg God's assistance to always keep this your resolution. Thus a very profitable meditation has been made, and the advantage of that one resolution may be eternal happiness.

Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1926.

THE AUTHOR

MEDITATIONS FOR THE LAITY

JANUARY 1

TRUE DEVOTION

True devotion supposes a desire to love God sincerely. Only after the love of God has been engendered in the soul can there be a consideration of devotion. True devotion may be defined as an intensified love of God. The love of God or charity, as it is better termed, "and devotion differ no more from each other than fire does from flame; for charity is a spiritual fire which when inflamed, is called devotion." When our love of God has arrived at that degree of perfection which makes us "not only active and diligent in the observance of God's commandments, but also excites us to the performance of every good work with an affectionate alacrity, though it be not of precept but only of counsel," then we may be said to possess devotion. A certain eagerness to please God, whom we love, is the characteristic of devotion. The devout man does not stop in his efforts with the avoidance of sin but goes farther by zealously striving to practice virtue to please his loving Master. The good and faithful servant does not limit himself to what is his strict duty but is eager and ready to do everything which will please his master. He works not for wages alone but also because he loves his master. Similarly, if our service of God is not limited by what is necessary to obtain the reward of Heaven, but goes farther and seeks to please the heavenly Master, irrespective of reward, then we gain a most affec-

tionate love from the Heart of the Divine Master in return. This love of God of ours and the consciousness of being loved by Him is the incentive for true devotion. Therefore it will appeal to everyone who loves God to gain true devotion. Once the way is pointed out the task will not seem over difficult and burdensome, and the joy of life obtained in consequence of its attainment will prove a constant spur to new endeavor and to perseverance in so holy a task.

Resolve to become one of the more beloved servants of God, to-day, by being on the watch for opportunities to do little acts of virtue to prove your desire to please Him.

Conclusion: Tell Jesus of your desire to follow this resolve, which He has been pleased to suggest to you, and ask for strength to carry it out perseveringly.

JANUARY 2

HAPPINESS AND DEVOTION

"A devout life is a life of all others the most sweet, happy, and amiable." There are, it is true, many restraints, mortifications, self-denials, that must be practiced by those who wish to serve God more fervently, "but in performing them, devout souls convert them into the most delicious sweetness." Devotion is "that true spiritual sugar which corrects the bitterness of mortification by the sweetness of its consolations; it removes discontent from the poor; solicitude from the rich; sadness from the oppressed; insolence from the exalted; melancholy from the solitary; and dissipation from him that is in company. It serves as well for fire in winter as for dew in summer. It knows as well how to use abundance as to suffer want, and how to render honor and

contempt equally profitable. In a word, it entertains pleasure and pain with equanimity, and replenishes the soul with an admirable sweetness." Seeing how devotion will meet every condition and contingency of life and leave its possessor happy, who will not be desirous of obtaining so great an aid to happiness, not only in this life, but much more so for the life to come? Man is created for happiness and will not rest until he has attained it. Here upon earth the enjoyment of unalloyed happiness is impossible because of the punishment brought upon mankind by the sin of Adam. The nearest approach to perfect happiness on earth is a life spent in true devotion. The excellency of devotion consists in intensifying the natural happiness we may enjoy and, in removing the sting of bitterness from the saddening occurrences of life, making possible a certain happiness in sorrow. Be it joy or be it sorrow, for the devout man, either is able to bring him happiness, since he knows that it comes from, or is permitted by, His loving Master.

Resolve to accept with the joy the hardships which a devout life necessarily entails; bear all thwarting of your will and desires patiently, knowing that nothing can happen to you unless allowed by God, and what He allows must be for your good.

Conclusion: Ask Jesus to give you the courage to generously engage in the practices of a devout life, and to give you that great love for Him which will sweeten the conquering of self.

JANUARY 3

DEVOTION COMPATIBLE WITH EVERY STATION OF LIFE

"It is an error, or rather a heresy, to say that devotion is incompatible with the life of a soldier, a tradesman, a prince,

or a married woman. It is true that a devotion purely contemplative, monastical, and religious, cannot be exercised in such vocations; but instead of these devotions there are several others proper to conduct to perfection those who live in the secular state." Devotion consists in great part of sanctifying the duties imposed on us by our state of life. Thus rulers, servants, tradesmen, mothers, soldiers and all callings are represented in the catalogue of the saints. The marks of their sanctity were not the extraordinary works which they performed, but rather the ordinary daily tasks which they performed well for the love of their Divine Master. The blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, St. Louis, St. Lydia, St. Sebastian, examples from the various walks of life, are not renowned for the extraordinary works they performed during their lives, but rather for their fidelity to their daily duties.

Resolve to sanctify your life by performing all the duties of your calling well, because they have been placed upon you by God; sanctify them to-day by often remembering to offer what you are doing to God.

Conclusion: Assure Jesus that you accept the duties of your state as coming from His hand, and ask Him to give you the will to perform them in a manner acceptable to Him.

JANUARY 4

GUIDE NECESSARY

As one who wishes to ascend Mt. Blanc or Pike's Peak, seeks a guide to lead him through the dangerous places, so too the man, wishing to ascend to Christian perfection, needs an experienced guide to help him over the perilous places. "Wouldst thou walk in earnest towards devotion, seek some good man, who may guide and conduct thee." The great St.

Louis said to his son: "Confess often; choose a good confessor, a wise man, who may safely teach thee to do the things that shall be necessary for thee." This guide is to be our friend, our adviser in our afflictions, sorrows, and relapses. "He will guard us from evil and make us advance in good; and should any infirmity befall us, he will assist in our recovery, and prevent its being unto death." "A faithful friend is a strong defence, and he that hath found him has found a treasure. A faithful friend is the medicine of life and immortality; and they that fear the Lord shall find him." (Eccl. VI, 14, 16). Those who fear the Lord shall find such a guide. Hence their choice will be governed not so much by sentiment as by prayer. "Since it concerns you so much to travel with a good guide in this holy road to devotion, beseech God with the greatest importunity to furnish you with one who may be according to His own Heart; and be assured that He will rather send you an angel from Heaven, as He did to the young Tobias, than fail to grant your request."

Resolve to pray earnestly for a good guide in your spiritual life, and to-day consider whether you have such a guide in your present confessor, or in some other friend who is interested in your spiritual welfare; if you have none such, set about prayerfully to find one.

Conclusion: Ask Jesus by means of His Divine Providence to lead you to the guide whom He has chosen for you, who will teach you His plans and wishes for you.

JANUARY 5

THE GUIDE

The friendship between the seeker of devotion and his guide or director must be a spiritual one, not merely human.

"He ought always to be an angel to you; consider him not as a mere man; place not your confidence in his human learning, but in God, whose minister he is, and who speaks to you through him, putting in his heart and in his mouth whatever shall be requisite for your happiness, so that you ought to pay as much attention to him as to an angel who would come down from Heaven to conduct you thither." To him you ought to open your heart without reserve, not only confessing to him your sins, but also consulting with him about the virtues and good works you wish to exercise, leaving to him entirely what to advise and command, and readily accommodating your will to his; for the great object of direction is to divest ourselves of all self-will and to follow in the path of obedience. Thus a twofold merit is gained, that of the good work itself and that of obedience.

This direction too, guards against eccentricities and indiscretions which might occur, were we to follow our own wills without the approval of an experienced judge.

Remember well, however, that the Holy Ghost is the true director; the guide we choose is but His instrument.

Resolve always to treat candidly with your spiritual director, never to allow your relations with him to deteriorate into a merely human friendship, but to see in him the messenger of God, appointed to make known His will to you in your spiritual life. In your next confession ask for advice about the things you are now doing or planning to do in the future.

Conclusion: Beg Jesus to be your shepherd and to lead you to that field of labor where you will find a mode and manner of spiritual life pleasing to Him and most beneficial to your soul. This He will surely do by means of a prudent director.

JANUARY 6

NECESSITY OF PURIFYING THE SOUL

To live a life of devotion is to live a life of virtue. Now, diametrically opposed to virtue is sin. It is evident that all seekers after true devotion must strive to purify their souls from sin and endeavor to keep them sinless.

Two dangers must be guarded against, the one in supposing that this purifying and keeping the soul purified from sin is a task too difficult for mortals, and the other in imagining that on the first day of effort the victory is already won. In the first case the task is not too difficult, for, as St. Paul says, with the grace of God we are able to do all things. The work may be slow and tedious, for "the diseases of the heart as well as those of the body come posting on horseback, but depart leisurely on foot. Courage and patience then, are necessary for this enterprise. Alas! how much are those souls to be pitied who, perceiving themselves subject to many imperfections, after having for a while exercised themselves in devotion, begin to be dissatisfied, troubled, and discouraged and suffer their hearts to be almost overcome with the temptation to forsake all and to return to their former course of life." In the second case it must be remembered that temptation will always assail us, and if we succeed for one day in overcoming all of them, they will return tomorrow, and there is not only the possibility, but even a probability, that we shall succumb to some of them, at least to the lesser ones. "It is absolutely necessary for the exercise of our humility that we should sometimes meet with wounds in this spiritual warfare."

Resolve to take up the battle against sin manfully,

neither to become fatigued nor disheartened by the slow progress necessarily encountered, nor to be over-confident because of any successes gained. To-day strive to conquer every temptation recognized as such.

Conclusion: Pray to Jesus in the words of David: "Save me, O Lord! from pusillanimity of spirit, or cowardice and faint-heartedness."

JANUARY 7

MORTAL SIN

Although we should like to regard mortal sin as an impossibility for those striving after perfection, yet we must admit that not only is it possible, but even those far advanced on the way to sanctity have unfortunately fallen into grievous sin, as, for example, the holy Psalmist David and St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles.

A first duty, therefore, is to purge the soul of mortal sin and then enkindle a hatred of it so great that there will be little allurement ever to commit another.

A brief but serious search into the state of the soul will disclose whether we are in the state of mortal sin or in the state of grace. Any one not in the state of grace must immediately put himself therein by an act of perfect contrition, coupled with the resolve to go to confession as soon as possible; otherwise he cannot please God. This done, he must steel his soul against temptation by a sincere determination never to fall into mortal sin again. God's help is ever ready to assist him in this endeavor. Those who, thanks to God's preventing grace, are in the state of grace, must enkindle in their hearts so lively a hatred of mortal sin as

never, with the help of God's grace, to burden their soul with a grievous sin.

Resolve, relying on God's grace, never to commit a mortal sin; resolve generously and earnestly with a determined will.

Conclusion: "No, O Lord! never more, with the help of Thy grace, will I abandon myself to sin. Alas! I have loved it too much; I detest it now, and I embrace Thee. O Father of mercies! I resolve to live and die in Thee."

JANUARY 8

MORTAL SIN

Mortal sin is the greatest of all evils. The terrible earthquake at Tokio, the World War with all its ravages, the influenza epidemic with its toll of lives, these are as nothing in comparison with the evil of mortal sin. One mortal sin is the ultimate reason for all of these direful disasters, one mortal sin is the ultimate cause of all these calamities combined, as well as for all the evils that have ever befallen man. All misfortune and suffering in the world is in the last analysis a direct consequence of the first mortal sin committed in the Garden of Paradise. True, other sins have added to the punishment, but not all the evils that have fallen to the lot of man since the fall of Adam and Eve or that will still come to man, can be an adequate punishment for that one mortal sin. What a dreadful thing mortal sin must be! Seek to realize its enormity. An ever mindful conviction of the evil of mortal sin will aid the determination of never committing one and will stimulate a lively sorrow for ever having committed one.

Resolve to fear mortal sin more than any other evil, and

never, under any circumstances whatsoever, offer the good God an offence so enormously grievous.

Conclusion: "To expiate my past offences, I will accuse myself of them courageously, and will banish every one of them from my heart. I will use every possible endeavor to eradicate the sources of them from my heart; and in particular such and such vices to which I am most inclined."

JANUARY 9

MORTAL SIN

It is most ungrateful for a baptized person to commit a mortal sin. Ingratitude is "a general sin, that extends itself over all the rest, and makes them infinitely more enormous. Consider how many benefits God has bestowed on you, and how you have abused them all, by turning them against the Giver. Reflect in particular how many inspirations you have despised, how many good motions you have rendered unprofitable, and above all how many times you have received the Sacraments, and where are the fruits of them? What has become of those precious jewels wherewith your dear Spouse has adorned you? All these are buried under your iniquities. With what preparation have you received them? Think of this ingratitude: that God having run after you so often to save you, you have always run away from Him to lose yourself."

A noble soul will be moved by the consideration of the ingratitude in committing mortal sin, and the desire to be always grateful to the good God will be a powerful incentive to avoid every mortal sin in the future.

Resolve generously to be grateful to God for all the temporal and spiritual benefits He has bestowed upon you, and never be so ungrateful as to offend Him by a mortal sin.

Conclusion: "Return thanks to God for waiting for you till this hour, and bless Him for having given you these good affections. Offer Him your heart, that you may put them into execution. Implore Him to strengthen you."

JANUARY 10

THE LOSS OF SANCTIFYING GRACE

When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden, He endowed them with the supernatural gift of sanctifying grace. "Grace is a participation of the Divine Nature," says Father F. W. Faber. This gift raises man to a dignity only a little below that of the angels. Mortal sin destroys this gift in the soul. When Adam and Eve committed the first mortal sin, they immediately lost the state of grace, not only for themselves, but also for all their descendants. God in His infinite mercy, came upon earth to die on the cross in order to regain this precious gift for men's souls. It is communicated to the soul by the Sacrament of Baptism. After the soul has been baptized, every prayer, every good work, every suffering borne for the sake of God increases the measure of grace in the soul.

"Better die than forfeit one increase of grace: do we believe this? No! but we say we do. If the funds were to fall to fifty tomorrow, it would be of less consequence," says Father Faber, "than that a sick Irishman in an obscure court should by impatience forfeit one degree of grace." But mortal sin does not merely forfeit one degree; it takes it all away. All the grace given in Baptism, all the increase of grace gained in childhood and youth, is lost by a mortal sin. The angels committed one mortal sin and were changed from beings of beauty to hideous demons. Never will they

be able to retrieve their loss. Man commits mortal sin and the saving mercy of the Sacred Heart makes it possible to regain the wantonly lost gift of grace. How incomprehensible is the mercy of God!

Resolve to gain a high esteem of that wonderful gift of God, sanctifying grace, and avoid every occasion that might endanger the loss of this priceless treasure.

Conclusion: Admire the mercy of God, who has so patiently waited for you. Excite in your soul a wholesome contrition for your past sins. Ask for God's help, never to commit a mortal sin in the future.

JANUARY 11

THE LOSS OF HEAVEN

Adam and Eve were destined to be happy with God in Heaven. After their time of probation, they would have been taken into Heaven without even so much as having to die.

Mortal sin changed all this. It locked the gates of Heaven against them, and had not the infinite mercy of God intervened, our First Parents would never have been able to enter Heaven. The angels, too, committed grievous sin and their punishment was exclusion from Heaven; the Redemption, however, did not extend to them. They will never be able to go to Heaven. The punishment of Adam's sin descended also upon us, his children; although through Baptism the barrier to Heaven has been raised. However, any mortal sin committed by us will have the same effect of closing Heaven against us, as it did in the case of the angels or of our First Parents.

"Reproach your heart with the temerity with which it

has hitherto strayed so far out of the way of this glorious habitation. Oh! why have I wandered at so great a distance from my sovereign happiness? Ah! wretch that I am, for false and trifling pleasures I have a thousand and a thousand times turned my back upon the eternal and infinite delights. Was I not mad to despise such precious blessings for gratifications so vain and contemptible?"

Resolve never to risk losing Heaven by placing yourself in the danger of committing mortal sin. The mercy of God is infinite, but not even infinite mercy will save us, unless we repent of the past and manfully strive to resist mortal sin in the future.

Conclusion: Thank God for the grace of Baptism. Beg for knowledge to realize the heinousness of mortal sin and for strength ever to shun it.

JANUARY 12

HELL

The only alternative of Heaven for the baptized Christian is hell. After the general judgment, for the baptized, there is only one of two states possible,—either the happiness of Heaven or the punishment of hell. "Consider that you are certainly placed between Heaven and hell, and that both the one and the other lie open to receive you, according to the choice that you shall make. The choice which we make in this world shall last for all eternity in the world to come."

Only one thing can condemn a soul to hell, that is mortal sin. "Those in hell suffer unspeakable torments in all their senses and members because, as they have employed all their senses and members in sinning, so shall they suffer in each of them the punishment due to sin. The eyes for lascivi-

ous looks shall endure the horrible sight of the devils and of hell. The ears for having taken delight in harkening to vicious discourses, shall hear nothing but wailings, lamentations, and desperate howlings; and so of all the rest."

What is more, these sufferings will last for all eternity in company of the lowest and most despicable of souls, and added to this are the insatiable yearnings of the soul for God and Heaven, for which it has been created, and without which, by virtue of its very creation, it can never be satisfied.

Resolve by all means to escape so dreadful a punishment, which is the consequence of wilfully committing a mortal sin.

Conclusion: Thank God, who has saved you thus far from so terrible a fate. Rely upon His mercy to obtain His all-saving grace, merited by the bitter suffering and death of Christ on the Cross, that you may escape so terrifying an end.

JANUARY 13

THE LOSS OF THE LOVE OF GOD

The greatest privilege of the Christian is to be allowed to love his God and Creator in an intimate manner. Rulers are loved by their subjects, but at a distance; only a few are admitted to familiarity and intimacy. God not only admits all good souls to an intimate love and intercourse with Him, but even invites and encourages such love.

It is a singular privilege to be allowed to love One so far superior to us, and a most generous condescension on the part of God to accept our love.

God is not our Creator only, He is also our Father.

"It is the very sunshine of life to believe and feel at every turn, that God is our Father, and is acting to us out of a Father's love and in a Father's way." (Faber). Every right view of God is calculated to invite our love. There were years when we loved Him dearly. We love Him now; blessed be His grace for that! But one mortal sin can change all that. Instead of God's love we would then deserve His hatred. Instead of being His child, we would become His enemy. The love which before we held in our hearts for our heavenly Father would be changed to aversion and fear. This is the ravage mortal sin works in the hearts of those who had loved God in sanctifying grace.

Resolve never to forfeit the love of God by a mortal sin. Do not forget to be sorry for your sins as offences against an infinitely good and loving God.

Conclusion: "Blessed be Thou, O my God! for although I am unworthy of all good, yet Thy generosity and infinite goodness never cease to do good, even to those who are ungrateful, and are turned away from Thee. O convert us unto Thee, that we may be thankful, humble, and devout; for Thou art our salvation, our power, and our strength. (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 8).

JANUARY 14

GENERAL CONFESSION

St. Francis de Sales, says: "I speak of a general confession of the whole life. Though it is not absolutely necessary, yet I look upon it as exceedingly profitable in the beginning, and therefore earnestly advise it. It often happens that the ordinary confessions of those who lead a worldly life are full of considerable defects; for they often make little or

no preparation, neither have they sufficient contrition; nay, it too frequently happens that they go to confession with a tacit inclination of returning to sin, which appears from their subsequent unwillingness to avoid the occasions of sin, and to make use of the means necessary for the amendment of their life. In all these cases, a general confession calls us to the knowledge of ourselves; it excites in us a wholesome confusion for our past life; it makes us admire the mercy of God, who has so patiently waited for us; it appeases our hearts; composes our minds; excites us to good resolutions; gives occasion to our spiritual father to prescribe us advice more suitable to our condition, and opens our heart to declare ourselves with more confidence in our following confessions. Speaking, then, of a universal conversion of your soul to God by undertaking a devout life, it appears necessary to exhort you to this general confession."

Resolve to pray for the grace of a good general confession, and gradually prepare for such a confession.

Conclusion: "Speak, O Lord! for Thy servant heareth." (1 Kings III, 10).

JANUARY 15

GENERAL CONFESSION

A general confession should be a relief, not a torture. Therefore St. Francis de Sales says: "Proceed courageously in the spirit of humility to make your general confession; but I beseech you suffer yourself not to be disturbed with any kind of apprehension. Sin is shameful only when we commit it; but being converted into confession and contrition, it becomes honorable and wholesome,—confession and contrition being so beautiful and odoriferous as to de-

face its deformity and purify its stench. If we be very humble, our sins will infinitely displease us, because God is offended by them; but the accusation of them will become sweet and agreeable, because God is honored thereby; for it is a kind of comfort to acquaint the physician rightly with the nature of the evil that torments us. Open, then, your heart perfectly by confession, that you may cast out your sins, for as fast as they shall depart from your heart, the precious merits of the Passion of your divine Saviour will enter in, to fill it with His graces and blessings. Be sure to declare all with candor and sincerity. Having fully satisfied your conscience that you have done so, listen to the admonitions and ordinances of your confessor. It is God that you hear, since He has said to His vicegerents, 'He who hears you hears Me.' " (Luke X, 16).

Resolve to be sincere and truly contrite for your sins in every confession. In your general confession strive to clear your conscience of every sin and doubt, so that you may have no fears or doubts about your sins in the hour of death.

Conclusion: In the words of *The Following of Christ,* our Dear Lord says to you: "Let not thy heart be troubled, and let it not fear. Believe in Me and trust in My mercy. When thou thinkest I am far from thee, I am often nearest to thee. When thou judgest that almost all is lost, then oftentimes it is that thou art in the way of the greatest gain of merit." (Bk. III, c. 30).

JANUARY 16

VENIAL SIN

Although venial sin is different from mortal sin, yet venial sin is so great an evil that no other evil, excepting

only mortal sin, can equal or exceed it. Cardinal Newman writes: "The Church holds that it were better that the sun and the moon should drop from heaven, and for the earth to fall, and for all the many millions who are on it to die of starvation, in extremest agony (so far as temporal affliction goes), than that one soul,—I will not say should be lost, but should commit one venial sin."

We may distinguish between two kinds of venial sin. The one kind is committed deliberately, *i. e.*, with full knowledge and consent; and the other proceeds rather from inattention, human frailty, surprise, and so forth, and therefore is not quite deliberate. Theologians tell us that the former kind of venial sin with the grace of God can be entirely avoided by those who pray and make an earnest endeavor. The latter are committed from time to time by all men for, "There is no man who sinneth not." (3 Kings VIII, 46). The Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, by a special privilege of God was excepted, there never being any stain of sin in her.

Now for those who wish to live a devout life it is necessary to endeavor to avoid all venial sins, not only the deliberate, but even the more indeliberate. Venial sin as well as mortal sin offends God, and "what probability is there that a generous soul should take pleasure in displeasing God, or affect what would be displeasing to Him, or willingly do that which she knows would give Him offence?"

Resolve to make an earnest effort to avoid venial sin. Pray for strength and grace to be enabled to do so.

Conclusion: "To Thee, O Lord! I lift up my eyes; in Thee, O my God, the Father of mercies, I put my trust. Bless and sanctify my soul with Thy heavenly blessing, that it may be made Thy holy habitation and the seat of Thy eternal glory; and let nothing be found in the temple of Thy dignity that may offend the eyes of Thy majesty." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 59).

JANUARY 17

VENIAL SIN

He who minimizes the seriousness of venial sin, diminishes his fear of mortal sin. The fact is that every sin, no matter how small it may appear, is a great offence against God. The offender, with the whole heavenly court helping him, could not satisfy God for even the slightest sin. The distinction made between mortal and venial sin ought not to be, that the one is a grievous sin and the other one is a small sin, but rather that the former has for its punishment the eternal pains of hell, while the latter is punished in Purgatory; the former takes the love of God totally from one's heart, while the latter only diminishes it. But to say that a venial sin is a small sin, may lead to a misconception.

"To those who serve God faithfully," says Bishop J. S. Vaughan, "and who show themselves anxious not to offend God in even the slightest degree, He bestows a wonderfully clear perception of the seriousness of venial sin. So long as we keep our consciences free from all deliberate sin, God rewards us by flooding our minds with spiritual light, whereby we obtain a marvelous insight into spiritual values, and are able to judge things almost as God Himself judges them."

"As at the approach of daylight we perceive more clearly in a mirror the spots and stains that disfigure our faces, so, as the inward light of the Holy Spirit more and more enlightens our consciences, we see in a more distinct and clear manner the sins, inclinations, and imperfections which prevent us from attaining to true devotion, and the same light which enables us to see those spots and blemishes inflames

us with a desire to cleanse and purify ourselves from them."

Resolve to estimate venial sin at its proper gravity, which must be measured by what God thinks of it.

Conclusion: "Give me, O Lord, heavenly wisdom, that I may learn above all things to seek Thee and to find Thee; above all things to relish Thee and to love Thee; and to understand all other things as they are, according to the order of Thy wisdom." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 27).

JANUARY 18

VENIAL SIN

As a man who has been suffering for a time from minor ailments, is predisposed to contract serious diseases and sicknesses, so the soul that has been weakened by frequent venial sins, is in grave danger of succumbing to mortal sin. Every sin weakens, to a greater or less degree, the will's power of resistance. Hence the Christian who carelessly commits venial sin, is so weakening his will that, when a violent onslaught of temptation assails him, he will be scarcely strong enough to resist it. An army that has carelessly given up its outposts will but rarely be able to stave off defeat. Every deliberate venial sin is a defeat suffered by the soul, like losing an outpost. How long will the soul be able to hold out against the attacks of temptation which threaten to ruin it, if all its reserve power has been taken away? True, the aid of the Almighty Ally may come to our assistance, but who can rightfully ask for such aid, when he has so often offended God by his infidelities, even though a definite break has not taken place.

"It is the very nature of all passions," says Bishop

Vaughan, "to increase in strength and violence every time we yield to their demands. If we accustom ourselves to disobey the law of God in little things, we form a habit, and, as it is said, habit becomes a second nature. So that when solicited by some really dangerous temptation, the chances are that the strength of the habit will assert itself, and we shall fail miserably."

Resolve to strive earnestly to battle against deliberate venial sin.

Conclusion: O God, give me the grace to avoid venial sin, lest, weakened by venial sin, I incur the danger of committing mortal sin.

JANUARY 19

VENIAL SIN

Even more injurious to the soul than an occasional lapse into venial sin is an affection for sin. "I therefore say that we must purge the soul of every affection to venial sin; that is to say, we must not voluntarily nourish the desire of persevering in any kind of venial sin, be it ever so small; because it displeases God, though not to that degree as to cause Him to cast us off or damn us for it. Now, if venial sin offends Him, the will and affection which we retain to venial sin is no better than a resolution to entertain the desire of displeasing His divine majesty; but is it possible that a generous soul should not only consent to offend her God, but also to retain with affection the desire of offending Him? Such affections are as directly opposed to devotion, as an affection to mortal sin is contrary to charity; they depress and weaken the spirit, prevent divine consolations, open the gate to temptations, and although they kill not,

yet they make the soul extremely sick. 'Dying flies,' says the wise man, 'spoil the sweetness of the ointment.' (Eccles. X, 1). His meaning is that flies which stay not long upon the ointment, but only taste it in passing by, spoil no more than they take, the rest remaining sound; but those which die in the ointment, deprive it of its sweetness. Thus venial sins, which come upon a devout soul, and stay not there long, do it no great damage; but if they dwell in it by affection, they make it lose the sweetness of the ointment, that is, holy devotion."

Resolve to avoid that venial sin in particular which you most frequently commit and for which you have a special affection.

Conclusion: O my God, I will be on my guard to-day to avoid all deliberate venial sin, but especially will I strive to avoid this one into which I have so often lapsed. Do Thou aid me with Thy all-powerful grace.

JANUARY 20

IMPERFECTIONS

There are certain natural inclinations which, while not actually sins, are nevertheless imperfections. "There are some people who are naturally of a light, others of a morose temper; some of an obstinate disposition, others inclined to indignation; some prone to anger, others to love; in short, there are few in whom we may not observe some of these imperfections. Now, although they are peculiar and natural to each of us, yet by care and a contrary affection we may not only correct and moderate them, but even altogether free ourselves from them; and it is necessary that you should do so. As a means has been discovered to change

bitter almond trees into sweet, by piercing them at the bottom to let out the juice, why may not we let out the juice of our perverse inclinations, and become better? For as there is no nature, though never so good, which may not be perverted to evil by vicious habits, so there is no disposition, though never so perverse, that may not, by the grace of God and our own industry, be brought under and overcome."

St. Francis de Sales himself is a shining example of such a victory won over natural inclinations. Of an irritable temper, he so well overcame himself as to be considered one of the meekest and most amiable of men. On one occasion, when asked why he did not reprimand with more show of temper, he answered, "Would you have me lose in five minutes what took me twenty years to gain?" Only persevering effort with prayer and untiring generosity in the desire to please God can bring success.

Resolve courageously to combat that inclination to evil most pronounced in your character. Prepare for a long struggle, but be assured that success will crown persevering efforts.

Conclusion: O God, "free me from evil passions, heal my mind from all disorderly affections; that being healed and well purified in my interior, I may become fit to live, courageous to suffer, and constant to persevere." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 5).

JANUARY 21

DEATH

A consideration of death is helpful to teach us the real value of things. In the light of such consideration, sin also shows up in its true colors.

"It is appointed unto men once to die." (Hebr. IX, 27). This much is certain; how, when, where, under what circumstances, is known to God alone.

Another hint is given us in Holy Scripture, namely, that death often comes like a thief in the night, when not expected, when we are not prepared for it. The moment of death is approaching; each hour brings it nearer. When it does come, we shall have a very different aspect of the things around us. Then the pleasures, the vanities, the worldly joys and vain affections of your life shall seem like empty shadows and clouds. Ah, for what toys and deceitful vanities have you offended God? You shall then see that you have forsaken Him for a mere nothing. On the other hand, devotion and good works will then seem to you sweet and delightful. Why did you not follow this lovely and pleasant path?

Then the sins which before seemed very small will appear as large as mountains, and your devotion very small. Consider how the soul, when it departs from the body, takes flight to the right hand or to the left. Whither shall your soul go? What way will it take? No other than the one it began here in this world.

Was the soul circumspect and did it seek to preserve unspotted its God-given purity? If so, it followed the way surest to Heaven. Or was the soul lax and careless, little understanding the malice of sin? Then there is danger that it followed the broad road which leads to perdition.

How the soul will then realize that the so called smaller sins and imperfections were really the beginnings of grave sins, which might easily have been resisted, had they been combated in their inception. Then no sin shall seem small, not only because a slight offence against God can never be considered trivial, but also because the interrelation be-

tween venial sins and grave sins will then be fully understood.

Resolve to weigh the seriousness of sin in the light of death; to-day keep from all deliberate venial sin.

Conclusion: "Ah, receive me, O Lord! into Thy protection at that dreadful day; make that hour happy and favorable to me, and rather let all the others days of my life be sad and sorrowful."

JANUARY 22

JUDGMENT

"It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment." (Hebr. IX, 27). How will our sins and imperfections appear at that dread moment? Nothing defiled can enter the kingdom of Heaven, says Holy Writ. How tremendous will even imperfections appear, when seen in the white light of God's judgment?

It has well been said that a soul sullied with venial sin and imperfections would not want to enter the kingdom of Heaven in that state, even were it possible, because of the shame they would cause it, realizing then how offensive and detestable sin is.

The opinion we shall have of sin on the day of judgment is the opinion we should have of it now. Those venial sins and imperfections, those sinful habits that we make so light of to-day, will appear in an entirely different aspect on the day of judgment. Nor shall we need to be convinced of their heinousness, which will be apparent at the sight of them.

This true insight into the nature of sin will come to us

when we perceive the holiness of God. Then the soul must needs understand that no sin can be small when measured as an offence of God's holiness. The punishment due will be readily accepted, for the soul will then understand that no punishment suffered by a creature can justly compensate for the offence of God's holiness; and every punishment will seem merciful in comparison with the offence.

Resolve to weigh the seriousness of sin in the light of God's judgment.

Conclusion: "Ah! I will judge myself now, that I may not be judged then! I will examine my conscience and condemn myself! I will accuse myself and amend my life, so that the eternal Judge may not condemn me on that dreadful day. I will, therefore, confess my sins, and receive all necessary advice."

JANUARY 23

HELL; ITS PUNISHMENT

The Catholic doctrine on hell is, that it is "a state to which the wicked are condemned, and in which they are deprived of the sight of God for all eternity, and suffer dreadful torments."

The wicked are those who die in the state of mortal sin. To be deprived of the sight of God is the worst of all torments, for the soul is made for God and can rest only in Him. "Now if Absolom found the privation of the amiable face of his father, David, more grievous to him than his banishment, good God! what grief will it cause to be forever excluded from the sight of Thy most sweet and gracious countenance?"

In addition, there is the torment of burning in an ever-

lasting fire. Who can fathom the thought,—forever and ever? "Terrify your soul with the words of the prophet Isaiah: O my soul! art thou able to dwell with this devouring fire? Canst thou endure to dwell with everlasting burning? Canst thou think of parting with thy God forever?" Who will dare to deny this truth and still believe in Heaven? Both are based on the same authority, namely, Divine Revelation. To deny the one, we must also deny the other. Never expose your soul to so dreadful a fate by the commission of a mortal sin; nay, endeavor also to avoid venial sins and imperfections, which in many cases are the forerunners of mortal sin.

Resolve "to use such and such means to avoid sin, which alone can bring you to this eternal death."

Conclusion: O merciful Jesus, "keep me only from all sin, and I will fear neither death nor hell. Cast me not off forever, nor blot me out of the book of life; and what tribulation whatever befalleth me shall not hurt me." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 17).

JANUARY 24

HEAVEN

Another great incentive for manfully striving to keep the soul free from the contamination of all sin is the thought of heaven. "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." The delights of heaven, as St. Paul says, are indescribible, for "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him." (1 Cor. 11 9). All this joy, picture it as you wish, is to be the possession of those who

for a short period of probation are faithful in striving to honor God and in avoiding offense of Him, by the only thing which can offend Him, SIN. Hence St. James says: "Blessed the man who endureth temptation, for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God has promised to them that love Him." (Ep. I, 12). In this life the soul is everywhere and at all times seeking happiness. The soul was created for happiness. But nowhere can perfect happiness be possessed except in union with God. The souls that attain heaven gain this union. "The blessed are in the enjoyment of God, who favors them forever with a sight of His lovely presence, and thereby infuses into their hearts a treasure of delights. How great a felicity must it be to be united to their first principle, their sovereign Good. They are like happy birds flying and singing perpetually in the air of His divinity, which encompasses them on all sides with incredible pleasure." Added to this delight is the company of multitudes of heavenly inhabitants who "mutually give each other unspeakable contentment, and live in the consolation of a happy, indissoluble society." How salutary then to combat sin even at the cost of suffering and tribulation, for "that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." (II Cor. IV, 17).

Resolve by all means to gain this eternal felicity, sin alone can endanger or rob us of it.

Conclusion: "Blessed be Thou forever, O sweet and sovereign Creator and Saviour, who art so good, and who dost communicate to us so liberally the everlasting treasures of Thy glory! And blessed forever be you, He says, my beloved creatures, who have served Me so faithfully with love and constancy; behold you shall be admitted to sing my praises forever."

JANUARY 25

CHOICE OF A DEVOUT LIFE

Consider two classes of men. The former are bent on getting as much out of life as they possibly can, and the world calls them wise. They seek pleasure, possessions, honor, position, and the world says these are laudable aims. One characteristic marks them all; it is the badge which shows the army to which they belong,—"Selfishness." In all things, their ultimate aim is always, self. From time to time there may be heroic action on their part, but the guiding motive and the motto of their class is at once disclosed, it is "Self." True, they may perform philanthropic deeds, but only prompted by self. Generosity is not unknown to them; however, analysis discovers this same principle. In short, the god of their hearts is "self." To this god they will sacrifice their duty to their Creator, friends, principle, yes, even the soul itself.

The latter class of men are those imbued with the spirit of "sacrifice." Self-abnegation is the mark that distinguishes them. Their aim is always the service of God and the welfare of their neighbor, no matter what it costs them personally. The banner under which they are enrolled is the Cross of Christ. They are heroic, generous and charitable, but the motive is always the glory of God, or the benefit of their neighbor, for the love of God. The thought which is ever uppermost in their minds is the one expressed by Thomas à Kempis when he says: "Know that the love of thyself is more hurtful to thee than any thing in the world." (Bk. III, 27). For this reason those in this class forego

pleasure, possessions and honor when not compatible with furthering the glory of God and the good of their neighbor. Their guiding light, is the example of Christ. Their leader is Jesus Christ. For Him they will sacrifice everything.

Here are the two banners inscribed respectively, "Self" and "Sacrifice." Every Christian must enroll under one or the other of them. What choice will yours be?

Resolve to enlist under the banner of Christ. Set about the conquest of self. Your leader is a noble One, always going before with example and encouragement.

Conclusion: Hear your chosen Commander say to you: "Let this man seek this, another that; let this man glory in this thing, another in that, and be praised a thousand times; but thou, for thy part, rejoice neither in this nor in that, but in the contempt of thyself, and in my good pleasure and honor alone. This is what thou oughtest to wish, that, whether in life or in death, God may be always glorified in thee." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, 49).

JANUARY 26

NECESSITY OF PRAYER

There are two kinds of prayer, vocal and mental. Although the higher and better kind is mental prayer, nevertheless vocal prayer must not be neglected.

No adult Christian can be saved without prayer. He may not be able to exercise mental prayer, but he is surely able to pray vocally.

By vocal prayer we here understand, speaking to God by words either articulated or read. The most common vocal

prayers of the Catholic are: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Apostles Creed, the Confiteor, the Acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity, the Act of Contrition, the Angelus, and various ejaculations. These prayers are taught to children and recited by them from earliest youth, and they are their constant prayers as long as they live.

Without prayer there is no communication with God, and without communication with God there can be no friendship with Him. Besides, although the graces of God are at our disposal, nevertheless the condition for receiving them is that we ask for them. All men are given sufficient grace to be saved, for God wills the salvation of all; but as we do not utilize all the graces proffered us by God, we must obtain additional graces, which come to us through prayer. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, that man should pray if he would attain eternal salvation.

There is another reason why prayer is necessary. Man is obliged to worship his Creator; the ordinary manner of doing so is by prayer. This worship is to be a worship of the whole man; now, as man is composed of body and soul, and mental prayer is especially the prayer of the soul, therefore, there should be a worship in which the body also takes part, and this occurs in vocal prayer, when both the mind and the body, are active.

Resolve never to neglect vocal prayer. Morning and night and often during the day raise the heart and voice to God to praise, thank, adore Him, and to beg Him for His blessings. This is a necessity for the man who would lead a devout life.

Conclusion: "Praise therefore and glory be to Thee, O Wisdom of the Father! let my tongue, my soul and all things created, join in praising and blessing Thee." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 21).

JANUARY 27

PRAYER OF PRAISE

As the foundation of those wonderful Spiritual Exercises composed by St. Ignatius Loyola, we find the following text: "Man was created for this end: to praise, reverence, and serve the Lord his God, and by this means to arrive at eternal salvation."

Praise is best expressed in words, which when said of God is nothing other than a prayer of praise. The Psalms of the Royal Prophet, David, are perhaps the loftiest examples of the prayer of praise. Hence their recitation was so widespread among the saints; and the Church has embodied them in the Breviary, the daily prayer of the priest.

When we consider that God created us out of pure love, not at all needing us nor being benefited by our existence; when we consider further that He created the whole universe for the benefit of man, the sun to give him light and heat, the stars as jewels to give him pleasure, the earth to give him a habitat and to afford him sustenance; when we consider lastly the excellence of creatures, be it the wonderful construction and organization of man's body, or the immensity and constant order of the planets, all is calculated to call forth from the thinking Christian praise of God. "What is man that Thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost Thou set Thy Heart upon him?" (Job VII, 17). Praise must naturally flow from the heart of the person who appreciates these works of God. Call to mind the works of God's creation; the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, the animate and the inanimate, the rational and the irrational; examine them in detail and

behold their perfection, investigate their intricacy, yet entire simplicity; then admire and praise their Maker.

Resolve daily to praise God and His wonderful works. At least each time you say the "Glory be to God, etc." make it a prayer of praise of God, the Creator.

Conclusion: "Praise ye the Lord in His holy places; praise ye Him in the firmament of His power. Praise ye Him for His mighty acts; praise ye Him according to the multitude of His greatness." (Ps. CL).

JANUARY 28

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Akin to the prayer of praise is the prayer of thanksgiving. The one naturally merges from the other. The soul, realizing the wonderful works of God and that they are for the express advantage of man, is naturally inspired with sentiments of gratitude.

Although thanksgiving following praise would seem to be the logical sequence of the acts of the soul, nevertheless Father Faber in his book, "All for Jesus," tells us (p. 209): "If we had to name anything which seems unaccountably to have fallen out of most men's practical religion altogether, it would be the duty of thanksgiving. It is not easy to exaggerate the common neglect of this duty. There is little enough of prayer, but there is still less thanksgiving. For every million Paters and Aves, which rise up from the earth to avoid evils or to ask graces, how many, do you suppose, follow after in thanksgiving for the evils averted or the graces given?" And yet this duty is a very urgent one. He quotes St. Gregory of Nyssa, as saying: "I think that if our whole life long we conversed with God without

distraction, and did nothing but give thanks, we should be just as far from adequately thanking our heavenly Benefactor, as if we had never thought of thanking Him at all. For time has three parts, the past, the present, and the future. If you look at the present, it is by God that you are now living; if at the future, He is the hope of everything you expect; if at the past, you never would have been if He had not created you. That you were born was His blessing; and after you were born, your life and your death were, as the Apostle says, equally His blessing. Whatever your future hopes may be, they hang also upon His blessing. You are only master of the present; and, therefore, if you never once intermitted thanksgiving during your whole life, you would hardly do enough for the grace that is always present; and your imagination cannot conceive any method possible, by which you could do anything for the time past or for the time to come."

Resolve never to be remiss in the duty of thanksgiving. Daily at your morning and night prayers say some prayer with the express intention of thanking God for all His benefits to you.

Conclusion: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within thee bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all He hath done for thee." (Ps. CII).

JANUARY 29

PRAYER OF REPARATION

Prayer of reparation is the prayer of the sinner to satisfy God's justice for the sins he has committed. However, the sinner's efforts alone can be of no avail, "for in themselves and apart from the merits of Christ, all the prayers, vigils,

tears, penances, flagellations, and fasts of all the saints, and all the agonies, the blood shed by the martyrs, and all the sacrifices of all the monks, hermits, and anchorites who have ever lived, would not avail to satisfy for a single venial sin. Now, of course, a slight penance, or even a genuine act of heartfelt sorrow and love, may efface such sins; but that is because the Incarnate Son of God acts with us, and through us, and abides in our hearts by grace, so that we are not alone." (Bishop John S. Vaughan).

Prayer of reparation is inspired by the love of God. He who has a vivid realization of the enormity of even the least sin, and is conscious of the many personal offences he has committed against the infinite holiness of God, will naturally seek to make good these many sins by offering to God the infinite merits of Christ to repair the offences, as far as he is able. He who has a lively love of God will not stop here; knowing the infinite value of Christ's merits, he will offer them in reparation for the sins of others. This unselfish work is carried on to a great extent by the Apostleship of Prayer, whose members offer all their prayers each day to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in reparation for sin.

A second incentive for this kind of prayer is our own benefit. We know that every sin that we have committed must be satisfied for, either in this life or in the next. By this prayer, and especially by indulgenced prayers, we may atone for much of the punishment we have drawn upon ourselves by our sins. The best prayer for this purpose is the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

Resolve often, and particularly at every Holy Mass you attend, to pray to God to be appeased by the merits of Jesus Christ for your many sins and for the sins of all men. Beg for a remission of punishment due to your sins. Make diligent use of indulgenced prayers.

Conclusion: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to

Thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet more from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." (Ps. L).

JANUARY 30

PRAYER OF PETITION

The easiest and most common kind of vocal prayer is that of petition, by which we beg God for all the needs of body and soul, for ourselves as well as for others. Every believer practices the prayer of petition, if not regularly, at least when in distress; when human aid is known to be of no avail, then man as a last resource prays to God for help.

But such a man petitions God only when in a last extreme. He prays only when forced. The friends of God, on the other hand, pray always and without ceasing. They see in God a good Father and come to Him with their every need. Nothing is too great, nothing too trivial, everything may be asked of God, provided there is nothing sinful in it.

As our petitions should cover a wide range of objects, they should include an even wider range of beneficiaries. God is infinite,—His thought, His might, His goodness all are infinite. Hence the more petitions we present to Him, the oftener we come to Him, the more numerous the souls for whom we pray, the more we approach the infinite idea of God. The finite of course can never reach the infinite, but it goes to the extent of its possibility, and that is as far as man can imitate the infinite.

One of the saints has said that prayer is the weakness of God and the omnipotence of man. The poet puts it in this manner: "More things are wrought by prayer, than this world dreams of." (Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*). And

Father Faber writes: "God's ear lies close upon our lips; it touches them. We do not feel it; if we did, we should die." So willing is God to hear our prayers and a multiplicity of prayers!

These are thoughts old and familiar to us. More important, however, is an orderly and systematic mode of petition. Each day ought to have its own particular petition, which might be repeated weekly or monthly. One day could be devoted to begging for the needs of our soul, grace, or an increase of grace, the grace of final perseverance, etc.; another day for our bodily needs; a third for our parents, friends, and relatives; still another day for the needs of the Church, for the Pope, our bishop and our priests, and so on.

Resolve when reciting daily the petition of the Pater Noster, "Give us this day our daily bread," to pray for your own needs as well as for the needs of others.

Conclusion: "Let us go, therefore, with confidence to the throne of grace: that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid." (Hebr. IV, 16). "For everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." (Luke XI, 10).

JANUARY 31

MORNING AND NIGHT PRAYER

By a general law we are bound to worship God by prayer. However no specific time is set for it, either by the law of God or the law of the Church. Theologians agree that to neglect prayer for any length of time would certainly be sinful. In itself and apart from other changing circumstances, to miss saying some prayers in the morning or at

night is not as yet sinful; there is sin only when this neglect continues for a time, or because of other conditions making the neglect a sin.

However it would be folly to neglect a habit so well founded and approved by the Church. Daily prayer promotes order, for were we not to pray every morning and night, those who are busy and much occupied with worldly affairs would soon neglect the duty of communing with God altogether.

Again there is a certain fitness in consecrating to God the first moments on awaking, and the last before retiring to rest. "It is good to give praise to the Lord: and to sing to thy name, O most High. To show forth thy mercy in the morning, and thy truth in the night." (Ps. XC, 1–2). St. Francis de Sales gives the following advice: "Adore God most profoundly, and return Him thanks for having preserved you from the dangers of the night; and if during the course of it you have committed any sin, implore His pardon." The Our Father, Hail Mary, Apostles' Creed, the acts of Faith, Hope and Charity, and the act of Contrition, are well adapted to express such adoration, thanksgiving, and sorrow for sin.

"Consider," continues the saint, "that the present day is given you in order that you may gain the future day of eternity; make a firm purpose, therefore, to employ it well with this intention." A prayer declaring this purpose is the Morning Offering of the Apostleship of Prayer. At night the same prayers may be used. No fewer vocal prayers than these ought to be said morning and night by one who is striving to be a devout Christian.

Resolve to pray devoutly morning and night, giving to God your first waking moments as well as the last. Never omit this exercise.

Conclusion: "O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of

Mary, I offer Thee my prayers, works, and sufferings this day, for all the intentions of Thy Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, and in reparation for my sins." (The Morning Offering).

FEBRUARY 1

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

There is a twofold reason for praying to the Blessed Mother of God. The one to honor her, the other to beg her powerful intercession.

We need to honor Mary because of her distinction of being the Mother of the Word Incarnate. Nothing outside of divinity itself can be higher than this dignity. The mystery of Christ's Incarnation is so intimately connected with Mary that we cannot think of the one without thinking of the other. "The right doctrine of Jesus has in all ages been wrapped up with the true devotion to Mary." "No one can love the Son, but the love of the Mother grows in him also: no one can love the Mother, without his heart melting with tenderness toward the Son." (Faber, "All for Jesus," pp. 18 sq).

Those who truly love Jesus, therefore, will also honor His Mother. Not satisfied with honoring her, they will endeavor to persuade others do the same. "To get people to go to Communion on her feasts, to be enrolled in her confraternities, to have a picture of her, to gain indulgences for the poor souls in Purgatory who were devoted to her in life, to say one-third of the Rosary every day—everybody has an opportunity of doing one or the other of these things, and they are all pleasing to Jesus."

But there is one devotion to be particularly recommended.

Would that we were all inspired with it. We should do well then for the interests of Jesus, and our dear Lord would get such an abundance of new love all the world over! It is—to have more confidence in our Blessed Mother's prayers, a more undoubting trust, more real faith in her. There would be more love for Mary if there were more faith in Mary." (*Ibidem.*) "Let us run, then, to Mary, and as her little children, cast ourselves into her bosom with a perfect confidence, at all times and in all occurrences. Let us call upon this dear Mother; let us invoke her motherly love; and, endeavoring to imitate her virtues, let us bear a true filial affection towards her."

Resolve to say the Angelus thrice daily, your Rosary of five decades every day, as well as other shorter prayers, and to promote the same practices in others, as far as it is possible for you in your sphere of life.

Conclusion: "O Jesus! animate our confidence in Mary, not only that we may work more for Thy sweet interests, but that we may work in the way that Thou wouldst have us work, letting no creature be dearer to us than the one who was dearer to Thee than all other creatures put together!" (Faber, "All for Jesus," p. 19).

FEBRUARY 2

THE HOLY MASS

"The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the center of the Christian religion, the heart of devotion, and the soul of piety; a mystery so ineffable as to comprise within itself the abyss of divine charity; a mystery in which God communicates Himself really to us, and in a special manner replenishes our souls with spiritual graces and favors."

The Mass is the highest of all prayers. In it the priest is but the instrument; the real High-Priest is Christ Himself, who is also the victim. Sacrifice is the highest act of religion possible. To assist at Holy Mass, then, and to be a co-offerer with Christ, is to perform the greatest act of adoration that man is capable of. Here the God-man stands as mediator between God and man, and offers to His Heavenly Father an act of adoration on the part of man which is infinite, and alone acceptable to the infinite God. Never would it have been possible for human nature to offer to the infinite God an act of adoration so perfect and adequate, were it not for the Incarnation of the Son of God and His subsequent death on the cross.

We sometimes lose sight of this inestimable value of Holy Mass and substitute other devotions and prayers for this best of all prayers. Endeavor, therefore, to assist at Holy Mass every day, that you may jointly, with the priest, offer up the Holy Sacrifice of your Redeemer to God the Father, for yourself and the whole Church. "The angels," says St. John Chrysostom, "always attend in great numbers to honor this adorable mystery; and we, by associating with them, present for one and the same intention, cannot but be influenced by so holy a society. The choirs of the Church triumphant and those of the Church militant unite themselves to our Lord in this divine action, that with Him, in Him, and through Him, they may ravish the heart of God the Father, and make His mercy all our own. Oh, what a happiness it is to a soul devoutly to contribute her affections for obtaining so precious and desirable a treasure."

Resolve, daily, to attend Holy Mass. Now that the prayers of the Mass are translated into the vernacular, follow the priest's every word by means of the Missal.

Conclusion: "O Lord, receive me with this sacred oblation of Thy precious Body, which I offer to Thee this day,

in the presence of Thy angels invisibly standing by, that it may be for mine and all the people's salvation." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 9).

FEBRUARY 3

EJACULATORY PRAYER

The holy Apostle Paul tells us to pray always. This is impossible if meant vocally. Of course, there is an interpretation in which it is possible, but we will not treat that here. However a near approach to praying always vocally is by the use of ejaculations. An ejaculatory prayer is the raising of the heart to God and either with the heart or lips expressing some sentiment of love or praise. The beauty of these prayers is their brevity. They fly like an arrow straight to the heart of God. Their being short is a safeguard against inattention. Taking but an instant to perform, they may be said anywhere and at any time. Coming directly from the heart, they are perhaps the most fervent prayers we can offer to God.

"There is no difficulty in this exercise, as it may be intermixed with our other occupations, without any inconvenience whatsoever, since in these spiritual and interior aspirations we only make short deviations, which, instead of preventing, rather assist us in the pursuit of the object which we have in view. The pilgrim, though he stops to take a little wine to refresh himself, interrupts not his journey by doing so, but, on the contrary, acquires new strength to finish it with more ease and expedition, resting only that afterwards he may proceed the faster."

Like all other habits, this exercise must be cultivated by repeated actions. It must be learnt that all things can draw

the mind to God; a beautiful scene or flower, a harmonious symphony or the song of a bird, the good actions of men or even their misdeeds, in short every creature or its works has the power of drawing our hearts to God, sin excepted. When the things about us constantly remind us of God, then it is only one step farther to express in ejaculatory prayer the sentiments that must arise in our hearts. "I would advise you not to confine yourself to any set form of words, but to pronounce, either with your heart or lips, such as love, without any effort, shall suggest to you; for it will furnish you with as many as you can desire."

Resolve to acquire this habit of daily raising your heart to God many times by ejaculatory prayers. To-day say often: "My Jesus help me!"

Conclusion: "O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I implore that I may ever love Thee more and more." "Immaculate Heart of Mary, be my salvation."

FEBRUARY 4

OTHER PIOUS EXERCISES

The public devotions of the Church should always have preference over our own private devotions. Vespers, Benediction, the public recital of the Rosary, the Way of the Cross, Lenten devotions and sermons, the meetings and conferences of sodalities and third orders, always bring more benefit and comfort to the individual than any private devotion he may follow. The reason is that "God has ordained that communion of prayers should always be given the preference." "Although we may perform as good exercises alone as in company of a confraternity, and perhaps take more pleasure in them in private, yet God is more glorified by the

union and contribution we make of our good works with those of our brethren and neighbors." Hence on Sundays and holydays, which are especially set aside for honoring God and the saints, we ought, as far as convenient, be present exercises of piety conducted in public. However, we should not confine ourselves to exercises conducted in public. There are many which we may from time to time perform in private when they are not conducted publicly. The Way of the Cross, for instance, is a devotion old in the Church and enriched by many indulgences; besides, this devotion like the Rosary, has the advantage of uniting mental with vocal prayer. Too few Catholics practice this devotion, although the honoring of Christ's Passion is one of the greatest means of exciting love for Jesus and bringing His graces. Where it is possible to make the Stations of the Cross once a week, preferably on Fridays, a great aid will be experienced in furthering a devout life. Confraternities, sodalities, and third orders are productive of great spiritual good for their members and incite them to the performance of good works. Their very purpose is to foster a devout life. "Enter willingly, then, into confraternities of the place in which you reside, and especially those whose exercises are most productive of fruit and edification, as in so doing you practice a sort of obedience acceptable to God; for, although these confraternities are not commanded, they are nevertheless recommended by the Church."

Resolve to follow other pious exercises besides those followed by Catholics in general. Without overburdening yourself, perform these exercises regularly, as they will increase piety and nourish devotion.

Conclusion: "Help me, O Lord, in my good resolution and in Thy holy service, and give me grace now this day perfectly to begin; for what I have hitherto done is nothing." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 19).

FEBRUARY 5

HOW TO PRAY

We should pray, says the catechism, with attention; with a sense of our own helplessness and dependence upon God; with a great desire for the graces we need; with trust in God's goodness; and with perseverance.

All these requisites will seem natural if we consider our relation to God as that of a child to his father. A request of a child to his father, made without much attention, while the mind is manifestly engaged with something else, is little heeded by the father, as it is evident from the whole manner of the child that the entreaty is not very serious or important. In praying without attention man acts the same in relation to the Heavenly Father as does a child to his earthly father. Little need be our surprise then, if the prayer is not heard! The petitioner invites delay in the answer or an outright refusal by his conduct. No one is pleased by praise or thanks that is not seriously intended, and without attention it cannot be seriously intended; nor will any one be anxious to grant a favor that is not earnestly petitioned for, and no favor is earnestly petitioned for if asked without attention. Moreover, a haughty, and insolent manner is not apt to dispose a superior to listen with favor, no more than a distrustful attitude is likely to win favor. What is needed and expected is the confidence of a child, who by intuition knows that anything within reason will be given, and does not cease asking for his wants until they are granted.

It is true the eagerness with which a thing is wanted may so distract the mind that little attention is paid to the words,

but all thought is on the favor desired, such distraction does not nullify the request, but rather speaks in its favor. It is evident from such conduct that there is present in the petitioner that trust, desire, humility, and persistency (if the request is often repeated) which are the qualities of a good prayer.

However, there must always be in the background of our prayer, submission to the will of God. We do not always know what is good for us, no more than the child who demands poison, not knowing its deadly effects. Hence at times, in our ignorance, we may ask for that which would be a hindrance to our salvation. However, this ignorance on our part must not be an excuse to leave off praying for a request after a short time, judging that it is not granted to us because it is not good for our salvation. No, rather we must continue to pray perseveringly, for perhaps God is testing our perseverance, or exciting in us a greater eagerness for the desired boon. Should it not be for our good, God will grant us something else which we shall realize is better for us.

Resolve to pray devoutly; never let prayer degenerate into mere routine. Recollect yourself for a moment before beginning to pray; this will assure proper attention.

Conclusion: "O Lord, teach me to do Thy will, teach me to converse worthily and humbly in Thy sight." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 3).

FEBRUARY 6

MENTAL PRAYER

An explanation of the advantages of mental prayer has already been given. The necessity of this kind of prayer

for such as wish to advance in spirituality may now be considered.

All souls that have made progress in perfection have meditated. It is true they may not have known that they were meditating, but the fact is that they have often thought and thought over things spiritual. Either they occupied their minds with them in vocal prayer or ruminated over the truths which they heard in sermons or read in spiritual books, without ever being conscious that this was meditation. Nor was this mere idle thought. Resolutions were made at such times, the heart grew warm with the love of God, and principles of spiritual life were formed which governed their whole future life.

What they did unconsciously and under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, we now seek to do intentionally with the help of the same Holy Spirit. It was the habit of thinking on spiritual matters, of examining for themselves under the light of God's grace what was useful and practical for their spiritual lives, and of forming habits of prayer, mortification, and almsgiving based on their deductions that lifted them to a high plane of spirituality, suspected neither by themselves nor by those who lived around them. To adopt a similar devout life, St. Francis of Sales would have us intentionally follow a similar practice: "Above all I recommend to you mental prayer, or prayer of the heart, and particularly that which has for its object the life and passion of our Lord. By making Him the frequent subject of your meditation, your whole soul will be replenished with Him; you will imbibe His spirit, and frame all your actions according to the model of His. As He is the light of the world, it is in Him, by Him and for Him that we ought to acquire luster and be enlightened. He is the tree of desire, under whose shadow we ought to refresh ourselves. He is the living fountain of Jacob, in which we may wash away

our stains. In fine, as little children by hearing their mothers talk, lisp at first, and at length learn to speak their language, so we, by keeping close to our Saviour, by meditation and observing His words, actions, and affections, shall, by the help of His grace, learn to speak, to act, and to will like Him."

Resolve to meditate daily, to select one thought upon which to dwell all during the day, as far as opportunity allows.

Conclusion: "O Lord, lift up my mind, oppressed with the load of sins, and raise my whole desire towards heavenly things, that, having tasted the sweetness of the happiness of the things above, I may have no pleasure in thinking of the things of the earth." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 23).

FEBRUARY 7

SPIRITUAL RECOLLECTION

Just as a faint fragrance of incense lingers in the church all through the day when some joyous and solemn feast has been celebrated, so too the morning's union with God in prayer, holy Mass, and perhaps Holy Communion, lingers long in our minds. Recalling frequently the presence of God and retiring into our souls to converse with Him is what is meant by spiritual recollection. The more we succeed in this practice, the nearer we approach genuine sanctity.

Nor is this exercise incompatible with life in the world, for St. Francis of Sales says: "Retire occasionally into the solitude of your heart, while you are outwardly engaged in business or conversation. This mental solitude cannot be prevented by the multitude of those who surround you;

for, as they are not about your heart, but your body, your heart may remain in the presence of God alone. . . . And indeed our occupations are seldom so serious as to prevent us from withdrawing our heart occasionally from them, in order to retire in this divine solitude."

To many, what they see and hear during the day is a continual reminder of the presence of God, and they have little difficulty in retiring into their hearts often and there enjoying a short colloquy with God. Others must acquire the habit. Some fixed reminder should be chosen. St. John Baptist de la Salle, the founder of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, made it a rule to have a little bell rung each half hour of the day and a monitor call attention to the presence of God. A similar practice may be inaugurated by almost any one, by recollecting one's self every time the clock is heard striking the hour or half hour. Those who do routine work may recollect themselves each time they pass from one task to the other. Others again may select fixed times during the day when they will turn their hearts to God. Meal times are occasions when one can easily recollect himself, if he but determines upon these periods for the exercise of recollection. "As birds have their nests on trees, to which they occasionally retire, and the deer, bushes and thickets, in which they conceal themselves and enjoy the cool shade in the heat of the summer, so shall we choose some place every day, either on Mount Calvary, or in the wounds of our Lord, or in some other place near Him, as a retreat to which we may occasionally retire to refresh and recreate ourselves amidst our exterior occupations; and there, as in a stronghold, defend ourselves against temptations."

Resolve "to withdraw your thoughts, from time to time, into your heart, where, separated from men, you may familiarly treat with God on the affairs of your soul."

Conclusion: "O Lord, let my thought be with the Most High, and my prayer be directed to Christ without intermission. Since I know not how properly to meditate on heavenly things, let me rest in the Passion of Christ, and willingly dwell in His sacred wounds." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 1).

FEBRUARY 8

ASPIRATIONS AND GOOD THOUGHTS

A grievously sinful thought, deliberately admitted into the mind, is a complete internal act, for which man is as responsible as for sinful words and acts. It matters not whether the thought is afterwards expressed in words or completed in action, for comparatively little is added by the words or acts to the malice of the will. The soul turned away from God at the moment when it willingly consented to the thought. The punishment, therefore, of a deliberately admitted grievously sinful thought never repented, is eternal damnation.

If a thought proceeding from a sinful mind can be freighted with such serious consequences, contrariwise a good thought, nourished and fostered by the soul, must have correspondingly good consequences. Hence a good thought unaccompanied by words or action is also in itself a complete internal act, which is exceedingly pleasing to God and will merit an inestimable reward.

It is difficult to appreciate at their true value these interior acts. They are so easily performed, they may be so frequent, and they can be performed at any time and in any place. Good thoughts formulate themselves into devout desires, mental praise, interior acts of love, which are termed

aspirations. "We can go from country to country on the earth, wishing God more glory, and worshipping Jesus in neglected tabernacles. We can brood over the dim realms of Purgatory, and sigh and wish for God's glory and the interests of Jesus. We can range the courts of Heaven with undazzled eye, and worship there by inward wishes and mental praises. We can pass from attribute to attribute of the Divine Majesty with congratulations, joys, and desires, nay, even with impossible wishes it were more perfect. Yet all the while this is not mere amusement, no merely lawful occupation of our minds with the dear and deep things of God. But it is substantial worship, something with which the eternal Majesty is positively pleased, adoration impetrating actual graces, and securing corresponding degrees of glory." (Faber, "All for Jesus," p. 276).

"Make, then, frequent aspirations to God by short but ardent motions of your heart; admire His beauty; implore His assistance; cast yourself in spirit at the foot of the Cross; adore His goodness; converse with Him frequently on the affairs of your salvation; present your soul to Him a thousand times a day; contemplate His clemency and His sweetness; stretch out your hand to Him as a little child to his father, that He may conduct you; place Him in your bosom, like a fragrant nosegay; plant Him in your soul like a standard, and make a thousand different motions of your heart, to enkindle and excite within yourself a passionate and tender affection for your divine Spouse."

Resolve to spend your moments of spiritual recollection in forming aspirations of love, praise, holy desires, adoration, and thanksgiving.

Conclusion: Hear Christ say to you: "He who knows how to walk internally, and to make little account of external things, is not at a loss for proper places or times for performing devout exercises. An internal man quickly recol-

lects himself, because he never pours forth his whole self upon outward things." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 1).

FEBRUARY 9

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Banks are very systematic. Each day the books are gone over and the receipts as well as the expenditures are noted. A balance sheet shows each day just how the bank stands. The banking business of a nation is very important, the prosperity of the citizens is often dependent upon it.

And yet what is the saving, loaning, and safeguarding of money in comparison with the saving of our souls! If banks make so much of knowing just what their financial condition is from day to day, how much more important is it for the Catholic to know just what his spiritual condition is, when he knows that an eternity of happiness or suffering depends upon his being in the state of grace when death comes. For this reason, he ought to accustom himself each night to make an examination of conscience, by which is meant, to go over all the events of the day and draw up a balance sheet of the good and the evil done in that day.

The good deeds should be recalled also, for many think that only the misdeeds should be recorded. The latter practice is apt to bring on discouragement, and to stunt gratitude.

"As to the examination of conscience which must always be made before you retire to rest, every one knows how it is to be performed. 1. We give thanks to God for having preserved us during the day past. 2. We examine how we have behaved ourselves throughout the whole course of it;

and to do this more easily, we may consider where we have been, with whom, and in what business we have been employed. 3. If we find that we have done any good, we must thank God for it; if on the other hand, we have done any evil, whether in thought, word or deed, we must ask pardon of His Divine Majesty, firmly resolving to confess it at the first opportunity, and to avoid it for the future. 4. We afterwards recommend to Divine Providence our soul and body, the Holy Church, together with our parents and friends; and finally we beg the Blessed Virgin, our angel guardian, and all the saints, to watch over us and to pray for us; and thus with the blessing of God, we go to take that rest which His will has appointed for us."

Those who daily make an examination of conscience will find the examen before confession easy, for it will practically be only a summing up of the findings of the daily examination of conscience.

Resolve to examine your conscience carefully every day, and, what is most important, to repent sincerely of all sins you may have committed during the day.

Conclusion: "Pray, therefore, humbly to our Lord, that He may give thee the spirit of compunction; and say with the prophet: "Feed me O Lord, with the food of tears, and give me drink of tears in measure!" (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 21).

FEBRUARY 10

THE PARTICULAR EXAMEN

The particular examen is concerned about one particular sin or fault, hence its name. The object is to eradicate, one by one, the various sins and faults we are prone to. The

examen is usually made twice a day, at noon and at night, at night in addition to the regular general examination of conscience. The advantage of such a procedure is at once evident. It helps us to concentrate on one sin or fault. Shots aimed at the same point are far more effective than random shots ranging over a wide territory. So, too, concentrated effort against one sin will be far more effective than a resolve, now against one fault then against another, without our really banishing any.

Not only the saints illumined by God's grace understood the wisdom of such effort, but even men who seriously strove to perfect their characters naturally hit upon this same method. For instance, Benjamin Franklin used a daily particular examen for years, with very gratifying results as he himself tells us in his autobiography. "St. Ignatius, resting upon the doctrine of the holy fathers, upon the light of reason, and upon the authority of experience, made so great account of this examen, that he affirms, as St. Bonaventure had done before him, that it is one of the best and most profitable means we can help ourselves with to make great progress in spirituality." (Rodriguez, "Christian Perfection," Vol. I, p. 351).

It is advisable to find out our predominant passion, and at the start to devote all our attention to overcoming the most frequent sin or fault proceeding from this source. Should we find difficulty in discerning this defect clearly, we may ask our confessor to aid us. Having once decided upon the object against which we will fight, let us not easily turn to another, until we can sincerely say that we have conquered.

Every morning renew the resolve, at noon review the morning and recall how often, despite good efforts, you have committed the sin or fault. Repent of it and resolve more firmly to be more successful during the rest of the day.

At night before retiring do the same as at noon. This procedure ought to be continued, no matter how wearisome it may become, until at noon and at night we are able to say, with God's help we have not fallen into the sin or fault at all.

"The object in plucking up the weeds is, that flowers and fruit may grow in their place. The time, therefore, of the particular examen, is in like manner, well employed, when we exercise ourselves in rooting out of our soul's vicious and bad inclinations; but all this must be done with intent to plant the odoriferous flowers of virtue in their place." (*Christian Perfection,* p. 355). Hence after our faults have been eradicated, we must seek to gain habits of virtue by the same method. Then instead of counting the times we have failed, we count the number of times we have performed a certain act of virtue. This twofold task by means of the particular examen, it will be readily understood, is the work of a lifetime.

Resolve to banish the predominant fault of your life, and do it by means of the particular examen.

Conclusion: Hear our Blessed Lord say to you, as He did to the prophet Jeremias: "I have established and appointed you, that you should pluck up and destroy; that you should pull down and dissipate; in order that you should build and plant again anew." (Jer. I, 10).

FEBRUARY 11

CONFESSION

Confession was instituted by our Saviour to wash away our sins. As a bath cleanses and refreshes us, as well as gives us a feeling of well-being and renewed energy, so

does the Sacrament of Penance cleanse us from the filth and contamination of sin and gives us a feeling of spiritual well-being and energy to war against future sins.

"Nothing defiled can enter the Kingdom of Heaven," says Holy Writ. The soul stained with sin is defiled and, therefore, cannot enter Heaven while in that state. Confession makes it possible to cleanse the soul of this defilement. For the soul guilty of mortal sin after Baptism, there is no other means of salvation besides confession, excepting an Act of perfect contrition, which in itself contains the sincere resolve to receive the Sacrament of Penance as soon as possible. Venial sin, however, may be cleansed from the soul by sorrow with the use of some of the other Sacraments or sacramentals, or even by the purifying flames of Purgatory.

This Sacrament is above all a manifestation of God's mercy. "I wish not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live," are the words of the Holy Spirit, and in regard to this Sacrament they force the thought of God's mercy uppermost in our minds. The hardships of confession must give way to the thought of God's mercy. Hard as it may seem, there is no comparison between the confusion that confession may bring to the soul, and the boon that God gives to man in the forgiveness of sin through this Sacrament. To confess one's wrongdoings is a natural impulse of the heart, and there is a sense of relief when one's secret is shared by someone else. This fact holds even for a confession outside of the Sacrament. In the Sacrament there is more than relief, there is the knowledge of the sins having actually been taken away, blotted out, so that they no longer exist. For this effect there is necessary a sincere sorrow for having offended God. Without genuine sorrow there can be no forgiveness. So potent is genuine sorrow that the Sacra-

ment will be effective even when the telling of one's sins is impossible except in a most general way. But without sorrow the most minute and detailed confession is of no avail. Confession with true sorrow brings the application of God's mercy to the soul. By it "you will also practice the virtues of humility, obedience, sincerity, charity; nay, in a word, in this one act of confession you shall exercise more virtues than in any other whatsoever."

Resolve ever to receive this Sacrament of God's mercy with the utmost care, with genuine supernatural sorrow, and with gratitude for the loving mercy God manifests and exercises in this act of forgiveness.

Conclusion: "If a man does what lies in him, and is truly penitent, as often as he shall come to Me for pardon and grace: 'As I live saith the Lord, who wills not the death of the sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live, I will no longer remember his sins,' (Ezeck. XXXIII, 11; XVIII 23 sq.) but all shall be forgiven him." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 7).

FEBRUARY 12

MATTER OF CONFESSION

A Catholic must confess all grievous sins committed after Baptism to a duly authorized priest in order to obtain forgiveness for them. So strict is this obligation that even a mortal sin which may have been forgiven without having been confessed, must nevertheless be confessed when an opportunity offers. For example, a mortal sin blamelessly forgotten in confession, is forgiven in that confession, even though not actually confessed; but if it later recurs to memory, although long since forgiven, it must now be con-

fessed under pain of grievous sin. Thus, too, sins forgiven by an act of perfect contrition, although forgiven at the time the act is elicited, must be confessed as soon as reasonably possible. Mortal sins forgiven without being specifically confessed in the Sacrament of Penance, as in a time of serious illness when the patient may not be able to confess must be confessed later, if the patient recovers. The obligation rests upon all Catholics to confess all mortal sins of which they are conscious in order to obtain forgiveness.

The obligation is not the same for venial sins. Venial sins may be forgiven without the obligation of afterwards confessing them. An act of perfect contrition, some of the Sacraments and sacramentals forgive venial sins, and there is no further obligation. However, there is seldom that assurance of forgiveness which we have when they are confessed and sincerely repented of, for there is always the possibility of a defect in our supposed perfect contrition, or possibly some barrier to the effect of forgiveness in the use of the Sacraments or Sacramentals. Therefore, in the case of venial sin also, the safer policy is to confess all of which the soul is conscious. Sins already forgiven in confession may be repeated again and again in subsequent confessions and repeatedly forgiven sacramentally. It is a sign of genuine and sincere sorrow repeatedly to ask forgiveness for the same sin long since forgiven. A loving son repeats his regret for seriously having offended a good father, and is consoled and rejoices to hear his father say that the offence has been forgotten and forgiven long ago. "Be careful at present, and sorrowful for thy sins; that in the day of judgment thou mayest be secure with the blessed. . . . It is better now to purge away our sins and cut up our vices, then to reserve them to be purged hereafter." (*The Following of Christ*, Bk. I, c. 24).

Resolve to confess all your sins, the graver ones even repeatedly.

Conclusion: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy; and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." (Ps. L, 1).

FEBRUARY 13

MANNER OF CONFESSION

Confession requires the sorrowful accusation of our sins to the priest in order to obtain forgiveness. Mortal sins must be confessed with the number of times they were committed and with such circumstances as would change the nature of the sin. Moreover, all mortal sins not yet forgiven must be confessed. The deliberate omission of any one of them through shame or for some other culpable motive makes the confession sacrilegious and none of the sins are forgiven. Venial sins may be confessed in a more general manner, the deliberate omission of a venial sin for any reason whatsoever does not invalidate the confession, and those confessed and truly repented of are forgiven.

The devout Catholic, however, is not satisfied with fulfilling this minimum of requirements, but strives to give the confessor a true picture of the state of his soul. Just as a sick person tells the doctor everything that may cast a light on the condition of his body in order to insure a speedy and permanent cure, so too, a penitent, earnestly striving to rid himself of the sickness of the soul, discloses everything that can help the confessor to find and to prescribe for a genuine cure. "Make no superfluous

accusations, such as these: I have not loved God as much as I ought; I have not prayed with as much devotion as I ought; I have not cherished my neighbor as I ought; I have not received the Sacraments with as great a reverence as I ought, etc., etc.; for in saying this you will say nothing that can make your confessor understand the state of your conscience, since all the saints in Heaven and on earth might say the same thing if they were to come to confession. . . . You must not accuse yourself of not having prayed to God with as much devotion as you ought; but if you have admitted any voluntary distractions, or neglected to choose a proper place or time or posture, requisite for engaging your attention in prayer, accuse yourself of it with simplicity, without those general allegations which signify nothing in confession. Do not content yourself with confessing your venial sins merely as to the fact, but accuse yourself also of the motive which induced you to commit them. For example, be not content to say, you have told a lie without prejudice to any person; but also declare whether it was vainglory, to praise or to excuse yourself, or whether in jest or through obstinacy. . . . By doing so you not only discover the sin, but also your evil inclinations, customs, habits, and other roots of the sin, by means of which your confessor acquires a more perfect knowledge of the soul he treats with, and of the most proper remedies to be applied. But you must always conceal the person who had part in your sin as much as lies in your power."

Resolve to be candid and sincere in confessing your sins, giving your confessor a true insight into your soul without exaggeration, in detail without profusion, with exactness yet with brevity.

Conclusion: "O God, what a reward of humility! I humble myself in confession, and Thou floodest my soul with com-

fort, light and strength to carry on the battle against the wicked foe of my soul, whose victory is naught else than the possession of Thyself, the summit of all felicity."

FEBRUARY 14

CONFESSION AND VENIAL SIN

Those who earnestly strive for perfection in their state of life will have mostly to do with venial sin. After a genuine conversion, when the grievousness of mortal sin has been realized and sin is truly detested, the soul will so steel itself against mortal sin that, with God's grace, few if any mortal sins will be committed as long as the person continues in his endeavor to lead a devout life. Most of our confessions will, therefore, have to do with venial sins. "Though we are not bound to declare venial sins, nor absolutely obliged to confess them, yet those who desire to cleanse their souls perfectly, and to attain to holy devotion, must be careful to make their spiritual physician acquainted with the evil of which they desire to be cured, no matter how small it may be."

Moreover, from time to time the confessor ought to be informed by the penitent of the state of his conscience. "With candor and sincerity, at least once every month or every two months, let the confessor also know the state of your inclinations," St. Francis de Sales advises, "though you may not have sinned by them; for instance, if you should be tormented by sadness or with melancholy, or if you should be inclined to mirth, or to the desires of acquiring worldly goods, and such like inclinations." However, this must be done with brevity, and lest the purpose of con-

fession be defeated, with a pure motive of learning how to advance in piety; otherwise this practice will degenerate into a spiritual conference which has no place in confession, or turn to a source of pride, in which the penitent, by disclosing good qualities and dispositions or even small weaknesses, may be puffed up with a spirit of self-righteousness and self-complacency. After all, the true spirit for confession is humility and contrition, joined with a firm purpose of amendment. "How small soever may be the sins which you confess, you must always conceive a sincere sorrow for them and make a firm resolution never to commit them for the time to come. Many who confess their venial sins merely out of custom, and for the sake of order, without any thought of amendment, continue, by this means, their whole lifetime, under the guilt of these sins, and thus lose several spiritual advantages." Thus if we receive this sacrament properly and "approach it frequently and with faith, we feel much better prepared to resist our evil inclinations. We have more strength to resist exterior temptations, we free ourselves with greater facility from affection to sensible objects, we aspire with more vigor after celestial goods, and we experience that peace mentioned by St. Paul, of which he could only say that 'it surpasses all understanding.'" Chaignon, "Meditations for Secular Priests," p. 280).

Resolve to obtain the full fruits of this Sacrament; "listen to the admonitions and ordinances of your confessor, and say in your heart, 'speak Lord! for thy servant heareth.'"

Conclusion: "Speak, O Lord, that it may be for me some comfort to my soul, and for the amendment of my whole life, and to Thy praise and glory, and everlasting honor." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 2).

FEBRUARY 15

HOLY COMMUNION

The nearest approach to Heaven possible in this life is the possession of Christ in Holy Communion. That which makes Heaven is the beatific vision of God. The vision of God supposes His possession. In Holy Communion we possess God, but do not enjoy His sight except by the eyes of faith. The same Christ who is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Who now sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, in the Kingdom of Heaven, comes into the soul of the recipient in Holy Communion. What more can be given the children of men in this life?

Nor is Holy Communion intended to be a reward for generous souls who strive to serve God most faithfully, but for all Catholics, even though they may have been unfaithful, provided only that they are of good will, have freed themselves of all mortal sin, and desire to honor and love God now. "Surely there is no other nation so great that hath their God so nigh to them, as Thou, our God art present to Thy faithful; to whom for their daily comfort, and for the raising up of their hearts to Heaven, Thou givest Thyself to be eaten and enjoyed." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 13). Our dear Lord assures us further, that this is not only a privilege for us, but from all eternity His delights "were to be with the children of men." (Prov. VIII, 31). Hence His invitation: "Come to me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." (Matt. XI, 28). Moreover, He tells us: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in him." (John VI,

57). We must be convinced by these words that the loving Christ wishes us to enjoy the happiness of this near approach to Heaven through the reception of Himself in the Blessed Sacrament. Truly this life is a "vale of tears," but our good God would have us possess as much joy and to be as happy spiritually as it is possible this side of Heaven, and the means He offers us to attain such happiness is union with Him in the Holy Eucharist. Religion should not be sorrowful and that which furnishes joy of soul is Holy Communion.

Resolve to understand more fully the boon we have in the Blessed Sacrament.

Conclusion: "Thanks be to Thee, O good Jesus, our eternal Shepherd, who hast vouchsafed to feed us poor exiles with Thy precious body and blood, and to invite us to the receiving of these mysteries with the words of Thy mouth, saying: 'Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you.'" (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 1).

FEBRUARY 16

FREQUENT HOLY COMMUNION

The devout Catholic will seek to be united with his Eucharistic Master as frequently as possible. The thought of personal unworthiness may be apt to discourage some from a frequent reception of Holy Communion. If worthiness be a requisite for the reception of the most Blessed Sacrament, who will presume ever to receive it? In this regard we must listen to the teaching of the Church rather than be guided by our own feelings. The Church has spoken through the decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Coun-

cil, issued December 20, 1905, in which it is clearly stated that the faithful should receive Holy Communion frequently, nay, even daily. "The desire of Jesus Christ and of the Church that all the faithful should daily approach the sacred banquet is directed chiefly to this end, that the faithful, being united to God by means of the Sacrament, may thence derive strength to resist their sensual passions, to cleanse themselves from the stains of daily faults, and to avoid those graver sins to which human frailty is liable; so that its primary purpose is not that the honor and reverence due to Our Lord be safeguarded, or that the Sacrament may serve as a reward of virtue bestowed on the recipients."

Hence the realization of unworthiness should not keep the devout soul from receiving Holy Communion, but rather be a spur to receive it more frequently, so that each succeeding reception of the august Sacrament will make the soul less unworthy. The practical solution of the question of how often I ought to receive Holy Communion will come to this, How fervent is my desire to receive our Blessed Saviour in Holy Communion, and how often may I do so without detriment to my daily duties of life? The matter of always being in the state of sanctifying grace, that is being free from mortal sin, which is an indispensable requisite, is easily taken care of, for in almost every church opportunity is given to go to confession any day, and if there is no set time appointed, any priest is always ready to hear confessions when called upon to do so. Moreover, those who receive Holy Communion daily will rarely be so unfortunate as to fall into grievous sin. Good will and the possible arrangement of our daily duties, therefore, will be the deciding factors as to how often Holy Communion may be received by the individual Catholic.

Resolve to receive Holy Communion frequently, making

allowances for your daily duties, and then consult with your spiritual director.

Conclusion: "I must come often to Thee and receive Thee for the remedy, and for health and strength of my soul; lest perhaps I faint in the way, if I be deprived of this heavenly food. For so, O most merciful Jesus, Thou wert pleased once to say, when Thou hadst been preaching to the people, and curing sundry diseases: 'I will not send them home fasting, lest they faint on the way.' (Matt. XV, 32)." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 3).

FEBRUARY 17

FREQUENT HOLY COMMUNION

A more noble motive for receiving the Holy Eucharist frequently than the utilitarian reason of benefiting our souls, is to receive our Lord frequently because He wishes it. He intimates this desire on His part and discloses this privilege so lovingly granted to us, when He says: "This is the bread that cometh down from Heaven, not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead: he that eateth this bread shall live forever." (John VI, 59). "Now, from this comparison of the food of the angels with bread and with manna, it was easily to be understood by His disciples that, as the body is daily nourished with bread, and as the Hebrews were daily nourished with manna in the desert, so the Christian soul should daily partake of this Bread, and be refreshed thereby. Moreover, as in the Lord's Prayer we are bidden to ask for "our daily bread," the Holy Fathers of the Church all but unanimously teach that by these words must be understood, not so much that material bread which is the support of the body, as the Eucharistic bread, which ought to be

our daily food." (Decree of 1905 on frequent Communion.)

Since it is the desire of our blessed Saviour that we communicate frequently, let us do it to please Him. "Those who have not many worldly cares to look after, ought to communicate often because they have leisure; and those who have much business on hand should also communicate often, for he who labors much and is loaded with pains ought to eat solid food and that often. . . . Receive the holy Sacrament to learn to receive it well; because one hardly performs an action well which he does not often practice."

There may be interference and criticism from others if we undertake this salutary practice, but as St. Francis de Sales says: "If you act with prudence, neither father nor mother, husband nor wife, will prevent you from communicating often; for if, on the day of your communion, you are not less diligent in the discharge of your duties, but acquit yourself of them with more cheerfulness and alacrity, however irksome they may be, there is no likelihood that any person will seek to prevent you from an exercise in which no kind of inconvenience is found."

Resolve to communicate as frequently as you can, desiring thus to fulfill the desire of the Sacred Heart, which burns with love for men.

Conclusion: Thou, my sweet Jesus, invitest me to receive Thee frequently. "I confess my unworthiness, I acknowledge Thy bounty, I praise Thy goodness, and I give thanks for Thy excessive charity. For it is of Thy own mercy Thou dost this, nor for my merits, that Thy goodness may be better known to me, that greater charity may be imparted, and humility more perfectly recommended. Since, therefore, this is what pleaseth Thee, and Thou hast commanded it should be so, Thy merciful condescension pleaseth me also; and I wish that my iniquity be no obstacle." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 2).

FEBRUARY 18

WEEKLY COMMUNION

For those who with the best of good will cannot arrange to receive Holy Communion daily, there remains the practice of weekly reception. "St. Austin strenuously exhorts us to communicate every Sunday; comply with his advice as far as you may be able."

Many are reluctant to acquire such a habit, for fear they could not come to the holy table with the proper dispositions. A Catholic is rightly disposed to receive Holy Communion if he is in the state of grace and receives the holy Sacrament with the right intention. By being in the state of grace is meant having no mortal sin on the soul at the time of communicating. "Although it is most expedient that those who communicate frequently or daily should be free from venial sins, especially from such as are fully deliberate and from any affection thereto, nevertheless it is sufficient that they be free from mortal sin, with the purpose of never sinning in the future; and if they have this sincere purpose, it is impossible but that daily communicants should gradually emancipate themselves even from venial sins and from all affection thereto."

Therefore, the best means of arriving at sinlessness is the frequent reception of Holy Communion. By the right intention is meant "that he who approaches the holy table should do so not out of routine, or vainglory, or human respect, but for the purpose of pleasing God, or being more closely united to Him by charity, and of seeking this divine remedy for his weakness and defects." (Decree on Daily Communion, 1905). Granted these two requirements, the essential disposition for frequently receiving the blessed Sacrament is present. The demand for more rigorous requirements savors of Jansenism, which, under the pretext of showing

due honor and reverence to the Blessed Sacrament, had infected the minds of even good men. Surely the more perfect the disposition for the reception of Holy Communion, the greater will be its good effects. However, the best means to gain this more perfect disposition is the frequent reception of this holy Sacrament. "Thus, as men dwelling in the terrestrial Paradise might have avoided corporal death by feeding on the fruit of the tree of life which God had planted therein, so they may also avoid spiritual death by feeding on this Sacrament of life. If the most tender fruits, and those that are most subject to corruption, as cherries, strawberries, and apricots, can easily be preserved the whole year with sugar or honey, why should not our hearts, however frail and weak, be preserved from the corruption of sin, when seasoned and sweetened with the incorruptible flesh and blood of the Son of God!"

Resolve to communicate often, to learn to love God, to purify yourself from your imperfections, to be delivered from your miseries, to be comforted in your afflictions and supported in your weakness.

Conclusion: "It is indeed necessary for me, O Lord, who am so often falling and committing sin, and so quickly grow slack and faint, by frequent prayers and confession, and by the holy Communion of Thy body, to repair my strength, to cleanse and inflame my soul, lest perhaps, by abstaining for a longer time, I fall away from my holy purpose." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 3).

FEBRUARY 19

MONTHLY COMMUNION

There are those who cannot receive Holy Communion either daily or weekly. A mother of a family of small chil-

dren, for instance, may not be able to so arrange that she could receive frequently without neglecting her household duties. And yet she, too, is called to a devout life. For such a person, the faithful performance of the daily duties is more sanctifying than frequent reception of the Sacraments under the above circumstances; "though I may say, with assurance, that the distance between the times of communicating, for such as desire to serve God devoutly should not exceed a month."

It may be necessary, too, out of deference to others, to refrain from frequent Communion. "For instance, if you live in a state of subjection to persons who are so ill instructed or so capricious as to be troubled to see you communicate so frequently, it would, in such a case, be advisable to condescend to their humor and receive Holy Communion only once a fortnight; but this is to be understood when you can by no other means remove the difficulty."

However, the duties of one's state of life, honorably engaged in,—presupposing them to be sinless,—are never a barrier to frequent reception of this holy Sacrament. At one time it was thought that the duties of certain states of life were incompatible with frequent communion. "Nay, to such a pitch was rigorism carried that whole classes were excluded from frequent approach to the Holy Table; for instance, those who were engaged in trade, or even those who were living in the state of matrimony." (Decree on Frequent Communion, 1905). Hence the Sacred Congregation determined and declared that frequent Holy Communion should be open for "all the faithful, of whatever rank and condition of life," but "that the practice of frequent and daily Communion may be carried out with greater prudence and more abundant merit, the confessor's advice should be asked. Confessors, however, are to be careful not to dissuade anyone from frequent and daily Communion, pro-

vided that he is in the state of grace and approaches with a right intention." Considering all this, we may say with the author of *The Following of Christ*: "O the wonderful and hidden grace of this Sacrament, which only the faithful of Christ know, but unbelievers and such as are slaves to sin cannot experience."

Resolve not to be lukewarm and negligent in receiving Christ, in whom consists all the hope and merit of those that shall be saved.

Conclusion: "O Lord, trusting in Thy goodness and in Thy great mercy, I come sick to my Saviour, hungry and thirsty to the fountain of life, needy to the King of Heaven, a servant to his Lord, a creature to his Creator, and one in desolation to his kind Comforter." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 2).

FEBRUARY 20

PREPARATION FOR HOLY COMMUNION

Every care should be taken in making a good preparation for Holy Communion. The reason is evident. In Communion Christ, the Lord, visits us, and we can never pay Him the reverence, gratitude, and love which He deserves, nor can we humble ourselves to the extent that our nothingness and sinfulness demand. A little time spent in striving to fill our hearts with these sentiments should surely precede the reception of our adorable Saviour. In order to prepare the better it is well to say ejaculatory prayers of love the evening before. "Should you awake in the night, raise your heart to God immediately, and make some ardent aspirations, in order to prepare your soul for the reception of your

Spouse, who, being awake whilst you are asleep, prepares a thousand favors and graces for you, if, on your part, you are disposed to receive them. In the morning rise up with alacrity to enjoy the happiness you hope for, and go with a great, but humble confidence, to receive this heavenly food, which nourishes your soul to immortality; and after repeating thrice, 'Lord, I am not worthy, etc.; cease to move your head or your lips to pray, or to sigh, but opening your mouth gently and moderately, and lifting up your head as much as is necessary, that the priest may see what he is about, full of faith, hope, and charity, receive Him in whom, by whom and for whom, you believe, hope, and love."

Acts of faith, hope, charity, contrition, desire, and humility are the most proper to elicit in preparation for Holy Communion. They ought to be expressed vocally, but it is far more important that they should come from the heart. A prayer book may be used for eliciting these acts, or we may repeat them from memory. These set prayers commonly come first, and suggest spontaneous prayer, which, as a rule, is far more efficacious and ardent. It may be well to note, that "you should never omit Communion for lack of time to prepare for it, when that time has to be devoted to serving the family, attending to an invalid, or to any other charitable office that does not admit of delay." (*The Eucharistic Triduum,* by Père Jules Lintelo, S. J., p. 63, 2nd. ed). As for the rest, "If I cannot as yet be all heavenly, and all on fire, like the Cherubim and Seraphim, I will endeavor to apply myself to devotion, and to prepare my heart for acquiring some small flame of divine fire, by the humble reception of this life-giving Sacrament." (*The Following of Christ*, Bk. IV, c. 4).

Resolve to prepare well for each Holy Communion, lest from daily use you fall into a disregard for it.

Conclusion: "Whatever is wanting to me, O good Jesus, most blessed Saviour, do Thou in Thy bounty and goodness supply for me, who hast vouchsafed to call all to Thee. . . . Grant O Lord God, my Saviour, that with the frequenting of this Thy mystery, the affection of my devotion may increase." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 4).

FEBRUARY 21

THANKSGIVING AFTER HOLY COMMUNION

What is more natural than that one who has received his dear Saviour in Holy Communion should spend some time in thanking Him for this great favor. "O most sweet and bountiful Jesus," exclaims the author of *The Following of Christ* (Bk. IV, c. 2), "how great reverence and thanks, with perpetual praise, are due to Thee, for the receiving of Thy sacred body, whose dignity no man can sufficiently express!" Such and like sentiments will spring up in the heart that is well prepared for the reception of this august Sacrament. We should not stifle them by immediately turning to our prayer book to engage in vocal prayer, but rather the lure of these thoughts should be followed as long as they flow. Only after thoughts seem to fail us should we have recourse to the prayers in the book.

Of the thoughts that spring spontaneously from our hearts, St. John de la Salle used to say: "The commoner ones are the best, for there is nothing more moving or more capable of uniting us with God than to ponder the most ordinary truths taught us by our faith concerning this mystery." Father Jules Lintelo, S. J., commenting on this subject, says that in the thanksgiving after Holy Communion

"we will offer to Jesus present within us, acts of adoration, thanksgiving, and love, in union with His Blessed Mother, the most holy Virgin Mary. As regards ourselves, we will consider what we are to offer to our Divine Guest, and what to ask of His bounty." This may be done in the following manner: "Having received Him in your breast, excite your heart to do homage to the author of your salvation; treat with Him concerning your internal affairs; consider that He has taken up His abode within you for your happiness; make Him, then, as welcome as you possibly can, and conduct yourself in such a manner as to make it appear by all your actions that God is with you."

The act of thanksgiving ought to occupy us for a space of time rarely shorter than a quarter of an hour. At times, there may be good reason to curtail this period, but whenever the full period can be spent, it ought never to be shortened. It may occur that we have no devotion after Holy Communion; forcing ourselves to stay for our thanksgiving even under such circumstances may gain the grace of devotion for us, or at least will show our good will to our blessed Saviour which will never go unrewarded. The apostle of the Holy Eucharist, the Ven. Père Eymard, advises further: "During the day be like a vessel that has contained some costly perfume, like a saint who has spent an hour in prayer; do not forget the royal visit Jesus has paid you."

Resolve to use these minutes after Holy Communion with avidity. They are the most precious moments of your life.

Conclusion: "Thou, the Lord of all things, who standest in need of no one, hast been pleased by this Sacrament to dwell in us. . . . Rejoice, O my soul, and give thanks to thy God for so noble a gift and so singular a comfort left thee in this vale of tears." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 2).

FEBRUARY 22

CHILDREN AND HOLY COMMUNION

Those who have the care of children or are in a position to exert an influence over them, have a very powerful means of showing their love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, by preparing such children to receive Holy Communion at the earliest possible age and by fostering and facilitating a frequent reception of this Sacrament thereafter. Parents, guardians, teachers, older brothers and sisters have in this good work a splendid means of propagating love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, which will react very efficaciously upon their own hearts. Some are timid in encouraging this practice among children because they fear that children have not sufficient mental discretion, that their attention is absorbed by sensible and external objects, and thus drawn away from the contemplation of divine things, and that very often little ones approach the Holy Eucharist with but little preparation and thanksgiving. To these objections the reply is: "Our Lord does not require of children more than they are capable of giving, and He understands this thoughtlessness which alarms us; but He knows equally well, nay, far better than we do, that innocence is the most precious of all treasures, that Satan seeks to rob the children of it early, and that Communion alone can protect them from the wiles of the enemy. . . . For communicating well it is sufficient to receive Our Saviour with good will. And this children have just as much as adults; experience shows that sincerity of the most genuine kind is to be found in a child who has made his first Holy Communion. He loves Jesus Christ; he desires to have Him; then why not give Him

to the child? Very often the child is more fit to receive Him than we who undervalue its piety. Thoughtlessness is no obstacle to Communion unless it be wilful. . . . Children are giddy. Yes, but they are good and loving; and just on account of their need to love, it is necessary to give love its proper nourishment. We must cause them to love Jesus Christ, and, for this end, place them frequently in closest intimacy with Him. Their faults, however real they may be, have little consistency, and it is precisely this practice, *i. e.*, frequent Communion, which prevents them from becoming vices." (*The Eucharistic Triduum,* by Jules Lintelo, S. J., p. 9–10). "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." Here is a means for many to exercise their love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with great merit for their own souls.

Resolve, as far as it is in your power, to lead children to Holy Communion and to increase their love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, which is augmented each time they receive Him worthily.

Conclusion: "Oh, how sweet is Thy spirit, O Lord, who, to show Thy sweetness to Thy children, vouchsafed to feed them with the most delicious bread which cometh down from heaven." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 13).

FEBRUARY 23

VISITS TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

From Christ's choice of bread for transubstantiation into His most adorable Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, Father Jules Lintelo, S. J., deduces that Our Lord's desire was to be frequently received. "Bread," he says, "calls not so much for a monstrance as for a mouth." Yet after this desire of

Jesus has been fulfilled by frequent and even daily reception of Holy Communion, there is still an amount of love, gratitude, and respect due to the Eucharistic Prisoner in the Tabernacle, which draws the devout soul before the tabernacle for adoration and prayer. "We cannot visit our Blessed Lord too often. Love and devotion will determine the frequency of our visits. Time will not fail, where there is a good will. Our love of Jesus will draw us insensibly to the tabernacle; we shall find our supreme happiness at the foot of the altar; we shall find the courts of the Lord most attractive; we shall cry out with the prophet: 'How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord.' (Ps. LXXXIII, 2–3)." Thus writes Rev. F. X. Lasance in his excellent little book, *Visits to Jesus in the Tabernacle.*

What a source of grace and comfort these visits may be! They are the confidential chats of intimate friends, the tête-à-têtes of the soul with Christ. All that is necessary is an enlightened faith; Christ will do the rest. Many of the greatest projects for the honor of God and the welfare of souls were conceived before the tabernacle. Many of the most efficacious graces for the individual soul were received upon the occasion of a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Many a sorrow and trouble was lifted from the burdened soul after confiding it to the hidden Saviour in the Sacrament of the altar. But even more useful are such visits for adoring the God-man, who so condescendingly remains here upon earth for the benefit of man's soul; for supplementing the thanksgivings for the Holy Communions received, some perhaps hastily and negligently; to return like the man who, when he was cured of leprosy, came back to give thanks to his Benefactor. Friendship cannot long exist without frequent communication. If there be no personal communication, there must be an exchange of letters, otherwise the

friendship will wane and in time be forgotten. The greater the love, the more frequent will be the desire for friendly intercourse. Similarly with the love between the soul and Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The greater the love, the oftener the soul will seek to communicate with its Beloved, and after Holy Communion this is most easily done by visits to Jesus in the tabernacle.

Resolve to visit the Blessed Sacrament often; if compatible with your daily duties, do so every day.

Conclusion: "I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth. I have walked in my innocence: redeem me, and have mercy on me. My foot hath stood in the direct way: in the churches I will bless Thee, O Lord." (Ps. XXX, 8, 11–12).

FEBRUARY 24

BENEDICTION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

A devotion now often neglected is the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. This is an old devotion, dating back to the thirteenth century. It was about this time that the elevation of the Sacred Host was introduced into the Mass, probably as a form of protest against the theological errors of Peter the Chanter. The idea then spread in the popular mind that special virtue and merit were attached to the act of looking at the Blessed Sacrament. Through the influence of this idea the practice was introduced in many countries of carrying the Blessed Sacrament in transparent vessels resembling our present monstrances, during processions of the Blessed Sacrament, which came into vogue with the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi, in the year 1246.

After these processions and after returning to the church after having brought the Blessed Sacrament to the dying as Viaticum, (which in Catholic countries is done in procession), the custom was to bless the people with the Blessed Sacrament before placing it in the tabernacle. This blessing was also employed as the conclusion to other services, *e. g.*, Vespers, Compline, the Stations of the Cross, etc., which gave rise to our present Benediction. Its chief object is the veneration of the Blessed Sacrament, as may be deduced from the fact that the Church now commands that at this devotion the *Tantum Ergo,* a hymn of adoration, be chanted before the blessing is given. "The benediction of Our Lord Jesus Christ has not lost any of its wonderful power of producing every kind of good in the Blessed Sacrament," says Father Lasance (*Visits to Jesus in the Tabernacle,* p. 331). "Yet men make so little of the graces of Benediction; men seem to be totally blind to the inestimable privilege that the blessing of God contains. How small is the number of those souls who are present at Benediction on Sunday afternoons and evenings during the week. Yet, here for a while the world is no longer remembered; the vision of Heaven comes vividly before us, and for an instant we fancy we are already there. We see the lights kindled like stars one by one; the fragrant clouds of incense rise; voices and music blending in harmony; and we raise up our eyes, and Thou art on Thy throne in the blaze of glory. We are face to face with Thee, Jesus, the compassionate Son of Mary, and the words die away on our lips, and we can only bow down and adore Thee in silence. And while we kneel before Thee, dear Lord, and scarcely dare to lift up our eyes to Thee, Thou art reading our every thought, and giving us what we need, and what is best for each—strength, if we are weak; light, if we are blind; hope, if we are downcast; comfort, if we

grieve; counsel, if we are doubtful; rest, if we are weary." (*The Holy Hour of Adoration* by Rt. Rev. William Stang, p. 54).

Resolve often to obtain the sacramental blessing of Jesus in Benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament.

Prayer: "O God, who under a wonderful sacrament hast left us a memorial of Thy Passion; grant us, we beseech Thee, so to venerate the sacred mysteries of Thy Body and Blood, that we may ever feel within us the fruit of Thy Redemption; who livest and reignest world without end. Amen. (Prayer of the Mass for Corpus Christi.)

FEBRUARY 25

THE VIATICUM

The literal translation of Viaticum is "with thee on the way." It means a provision taken by a traveller for his support during a journey. In the Catholic Church it is the Communion given to those in danger of death. It is expectedly the last Holy Communion of the recipient. However, if the person lives for some time longer, this Holy Communion as Viaticum may be received repeatedly, once a day as long as the danger persists. There is an obligation to receive the Holy Viaticum for the journey to eternity when possible. "Death is a tremendous step, because on it depends our eternal happiness or misery; but in that hard extremity our trust is in the bread of the Eucharist given us in our Viaticum on our last journey to another life. The miraculous bread brought by the angel to Elias when he sojourned in the desert, where, fortified by that heavenly bread, he journeyed on to the mountain of God, Horeb (3 Kings XIX, 8),

was a beautiful symbol of the bread of the Eucharist; and Heaven is our Horeb, the mountain of God, whither the soul separated from the body journeys on. We must always remember, and hold firm to this conviction, that man has no other strength and life but what he receives from Christ, from living Christ's life, from possessing Christ within him. The life of Christ, of which man participates in eating of Christ's sacred body, is a fullness of life so powerful as to expel and banish every disease from the soul, cleansing it from venial sins and even from mortal sins which may be unconsciously clinging to it. It is of the highest importance, then, to receive the Holy Viaticum in the last uncertain hours of life." (*Visits to Jesus in the Tabernacle,* p. 378).

We owe God a debt of gratitude for this provision in the hour of our greatest need. The Holy Viaticum gives us the strength to pass through the trying hour of death with hope and trust in the goodness and mercy of God. It gives us courage against the onslaughts of Satan. It is, moreover, the germ of that glorious life planted in the corruptible body, which will raise the body to that glorified state with Christ on the last day; for Our Blessed Saviour says: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath life everlasting; and I will raise him up on the last day." (John VI, 55).

Resolve to live ever prepared to receive the Holy Viaticum. Pray daily for the grace to receive the Viaticum in the hour of death, if that be the adorable will of God.

Conclusion: "O Lord of mercy, strengthen us, Thy servants, in Thy heavenly grace, that at the hour of our death the enemy may not prevail over us and that we may deserve to be conducted by the angels into everlasting life, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen." (*Visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament,* p. 379).

FEBRUARY 26

VIRTUE

The practice of virtue is our life's work. "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. V, 48). The first and indispensable virtue for a devout soul is charity, or, as it is more commonly called, the love of God. "Devotion presupposes not a partial but a thorough love of God. For inasmuch as divine love adorns the soul, it is called grace, making us pleasing to the Divine Majesty; inasmuch as it gives us strength to do good, it is called charity; but when it is arrived at that degree of perfection by which it not only makes us do well, but also work diligently, frequently, and readily, then it is called devotion."

Charity brings in its train all the other virtues, not all to be practiced at the same time, but as occasion and opportunity offer. However, that does not mean that all other virtues are developed and perfected, but rather that there is a certain aptitude present to practice them, which must be utilized and formed into a habit. "There are some virtues of so general utility as not only to require an exercise of themselves apart, but also communicate their qualities to the practice of other virtues. Occasions are seldom presented for the exercise of fortitude, magnanimity, and magnificence; but meekness, temperance, modesty, and humility are vitrues wherewith all the actions of our life should be tempered. It is true that there are other virtues more agreeable, but the use of these is more necessary. Sugar is more agreeable than salt; but the use of salt is more necessary and general. Therefore, we must always have a good store of these general virtues in readiness, since we stand in need of them almost continually."

The practice of particular virtues is impossible unless a man be grounded in these general virtues. Love of one's neighbor can never be effective without meekness; the good of the former would be undone by lack of the latter. Zeal for the honor and glory of God will lose its savor if intemperate. Works of piety would lose their power to edify by any immodesty in dress or action. And no virtue can stand unless founded upon humility. Therefore, difficult though it may seem, these general virtues must be acquired and made habitual if there is to be any thought of a truly devout life. Difficult is their practice because the call for them is so frequent in our daily lives. Once they have become habitual, as far as that is possible for human weakness, there is fertile ground for the other virtues to thrive.

Resolve to adorn your soul with virtues; "for this is the will of God, your sanctification." (Thess. IV, 3).

Conclusion: O God, give me the grace to be virtuous; for, "the life of a good religious should shine in all virtue, and be interiorly as it appears exteriorly. And so much the more inwardly, for God, whom we ought exceedingly to stand in awe of wherever we are, beholdeth the heart." (*The Following of Christ* Bk. I, c. 19).

FEBRUARY 27

PARTICULAR VIRTUES

Of the other virtues, the best are those which are called forth by the duties of our station in life. "In the exercise of the virtues we should always prefer that which is most conformable to our duty, not that which is most agreeable to our imagination." The duties of our state of life have been laid upon us by the will of God. To be faithful in their

performance, to let nothing hinder us in their fulfillment, to consider them the norm of our lives second only to the law of God, to which they are never opposed when rightly understood and interpreted in a Christian sense,—will exact the practice of many homely virtues, which go to sanctify a man's life and bring untold reward. "Though all ought to possess all the virtues, yet all are not equally bound to exercise them; but each ought to practice, in a more particular manner, those virtues which are most requisite to the state of life to which he is called." Hence the man who has to work for the support of his wife and family surely is not practicing the proper kind of virtue if he strives to follow a contemplative life to the neglect of his duty. His being often in church during the time when he ought to be at work, even though he be master of his own time, is out of place. For him the virtue of industry, although a natural virtue, may be raised to the plane of the supernatural, and may do much to sactify his life. The mother of a family of small children practices more and better virtue by taking good care of her children and fulfilling her duties at home than by daily attendance at Mass, which, as a rule, is incompatible with these duties. The duties of our daily lives should be made virtues and fulfilled conscientiously for the sake of God who has imposed them upon us. These virtues are those which will best sanctify the individual, without making him who practices them conspicuous, and without making virtue distasteful for others, whose rights are often infringed upon when virtues foreign to his state are selected for cultivation. They are the more valuable because there is almost constant call for their practice, and if duly attended to, they become habits and build up a character whose possessor is pleasing not only to God, but to men as well. Thus a saintly life may be led in the family and in a community without its ever being suspected.

Virtue thus practiced never tends to puff up a man because there is nothing of the spectacular in it. Virtue which keeps man lowly and humble is the most pleasing to God.

Resolve to exercise the virtues you will have occasion to practice during the day.

Conclusion: Hear the Lord say to thee: "If thou wert sensible of how much peace thou shouldst procure to thyself, and joy to others, by behaving thyself well, thou wouldst be more solicitous for thy spiritual progress." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 12).

FEBRUARY 28

OUR SPECIAL VIRTUE

Each should have some special virtue which he can call his own. "Among the saints some apply themselves to serve the sick; others to relieve the poor; others to propagate the knowledge Christian doctrine amongst children; others to reclaim souls that are gone astray; others to adorn altars and take care of churches; others to restore peace and concord among those who have been at variance." These and similar virtues may engage our very special attention. It was once said of a certain woman, that she was never heard to say anything uncharitable of her neighbors. She was obviously practicing the special virtue of charity toward her neighbor. Of a man it was said that he was never heard to use a profane word. He, undoubtedly, had acquired the virtue of reverence toward God. St. Francis of Sales was never found impatient, hence his characteristic virtue of meekness. As in every diadem there is one stone larger, brighter, and more conspicuous than all the others, so also

there should be one virtue in a larger measure, more clearly defined, more easily traceable for those who might probe, which we have made peculiarly our own.

In selecting this special virtue we must be guided not so much by our attraction to some particular virtue, as by the need of our soul. If often assaulted by any vice, we would best embrace the practice of the contrary virtue, and refer all the others to it. "Thus, if assaulted by pride or by anger, we must in all our actions, practice humility and meekness; and make all our other exercises of prayer and the Sacraments, of prudence, constancy, and sobriety, subservient to this end." By the furtherance of the one we are unwittingly heightening all the rest. Hence St. Francis says: "It is profitable for every one to exercise some particular virtue, yet not so as to abandon the rest, but to keep his spirit in a more settled order."

Resolve to select some special virtue for constant practice, so that by the perfect exercise of this one you may attain to the perfection of all the rest.

Conclusion: Listen to the words of Christ, speaking to you: "In every thing, attend to thyself, what thou art doing, and what thou art saying; and direct thy whole intention to this, that thou mayest please Me alone, and neither desire nor seek anything outside of Me." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 25).

FEBRUARY 29

FAULTS IN VIRTUE

"Young beginners in devotion," says St. Austin, "commit certain faults, which, according to the rigor of the laws

of perfection, are blamable and yet commendable, on account of the presage they give of future excellence in piety, to which they serve as a disposition."

Fired with zeal to gain perfection, beginners will sometimes, through the fear of offending God, become a prey to excessive scruples. Scruples are not as a rule, conducive to virtue, but rather a hindrance. Many secretly consider them a sign of virtue and hence make no earnest effort to get rid of them. If one's love of God is genuine, servile fear will gradually disappear, and with it the scruples. Then, too, excessive austerities and mortifications are apt to be undertaken imprudently. "We must be careful to exercise them, not only faithfully, but discreetly; and to this end we must strictly observe the advice of the wise man, not to rely on our own prudence, but on the judgment of those whom God has given us for conductors." When a goal has been placed too high, after pursuing it vehemently for a time, and only a little progress seems to have been made, courage is wont to be lost and there is danger of the endeavor being abandoned. Far better to consult with an experienced guide, who will set the objective high enough, but not entirely beyond reach. The higher we rise, the wider becomes the horizon; so, too, the more progress we make in the devout life, the greater becomes the field of spiritual activity. The truly devout life is characterized by sanity, well-balanced proportion, and simplicity. Where these are missing in the ordinary layman striving for perfection, there looms the suspicion that something is inordinate. It is true, the example of some of the saints is extraordinary; the grace of God can work strange prodigies; however these examples should be admired as the work of grace, but not imitated until such time as there is a clear manifestation of a similar grace having been given in our own case, which rarely hap-

pens. The extraordinary should be avoided; to sanctify, the ordinary should be our task in life.

Resolve to follow the lowly, inconspicuous way to sanctity; to seek to be ever faithful in little things.

Conclusion: Christ says: "Son, thou canst not always continue in the most fervent desire of virtue. . . . It is expedient for thee to fly to humble and exterior works, and to recreate thyself in good actions." (*The Imitation of Christ*).

MARCH 1

ECSTASIES, RAPTURES, ETC.

"There are many things which some esteem as virtues, which in reality are not. I mean ecstasies, or raptures, insensibilities, impassibilities, deificial unions, elevations, transformations, and similar perfections, treated of in certain books, whch promise to elevate the soul to a contemplation purely intellectual, to an essential application of the spirit, and a supernatural life. But observe well, these perfections are not virtues, but rather the recompenses of virtues, or small specimens of the happiness of the life to come, which God sometimes presents to men, to make them enraptured with the whole piece, which is only to be found in heaven." Being a reward of virtue, they ought not to be sought or even desired by such as have made only a little progress in spiritual life, and who cannot so much as keep themselves in continual recollection. "Thou oughtest therefore, as long as thou art in the flesh, oftentimes to bewail the burden of the flesh, because thou canst not without intermission be employed in spiritual exercises and divine contemplations." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 51). Nor ought we to

waste time in desiring the higher modes of contemplation, which God has reserved for His saints. "I will lay open before thee the pleasant fields of the Scriptures, that with enlarged heart thou mayest begin to run in the way of My commandments. And thou shalt say that the 'sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us.' (Rom. VIII, 18); *The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 51)." Ordinary meditation on the revealed truths is sufficient to draw sweet consolation for our souls. The following of the commandments will bring us sufficient joy to be a foretaste of Heaven.

Resolve to admire the virtue of those whom God has found worthy of such extraordinary graces as ecstasies, but for yourself remain ever content with the small joys and comforts that God may refresh you with.

Conclusion: "Lord, I am not worthy of Thy consolation, or any spiritual visitation; and therefore Thou dealest justly with me when Thou leavest me poor and desolate." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 52).

MARCH 2

PATIENCE

Our Blessed Lord and Saviour seldom held Himself up as a model. On one occasion, however, He said to His Apostles: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart." Strangely enough, humility is not mentioned first, although it is known as the foundation of all virtues. Perhaps Our Lord mentioned meekness first because it is foremost in importance on account of the frequency of the occasions when it is to be practiced. Patience is the virtue by which we accept with equanimity whatever comes to us. Man is

a dependent being. He depends upon the elements and upon his fellowman. As he is not able to rule in all cases that which is independent of him, there are many things that thwart him, many things that run counter to his will. To adjust himself to these things, requires the virtue of patience. Only if he strives to exercise this virtue will man be at peace and enjoy happiness. Hence our Saviour Himself declares: "In your patience you shall possess your souls." (Luke XXI, 19).

The impatient man does not act according to reason, for to lose one's equanimity with regard to those things which are beyond control, is not acting in accord with reason. And yet impatience is one of the most frequent of faults.

The patient man has an attraction all his own. He makes himself beloved by all with whom he comes in contact. Moreover, he more frequently than others, achieves success. He has the assurance of Christ Himself: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land."

The consistent practice of this virtue requires constant watchfulness. Unless one is continually on one's guard, one is apt to be taken by surprise, and to lose patience. Only by continuous striving can we acquire this virtue and remain in possession of our soul. Without it the soul will be in continual unrest and turmoil. Happy the man who realizes this and strives day by day to be patient in all adversities!

Resolve for to-day to give special attention to this virtue. Note the many opportunities that occur in one day for its practice.

Conclusion: "O Lord God, patience, as I perceive, is very necessary for me, because this life is exposed to many adversities. For notwithstanding all I can do to live in peace, my life cannot be without war and sorrow. . . . O Jesus,

let me learn of Thee, who art meek." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 12).

MARCH 3

PATIENCE (*continued*)

It is not enough to be patient with that which provokes us, but we must be patient with all the circumstances also. Some would not be displeased to suffer poverty, if only they were not thereby hindered from coming to the aid of friends in time of need or to assist the many charities which call for help. Others would not mind interruptions and impositions if only they were not made so boorishly. Others would suffer little inconveniences that destroy patience so easily if they did not proceed from such blamable stupidity on the part of the perpetrators. Such conduct is no patience at all. We destroy with one hand what we seek to build with the other. "Be patient, not only with respect to the subject of the affliction which may befall you, but also with regard to its accessories or accidental circumstances." Nothing can provoke us except with the permission of God. Now patience consists in being satisfied with the whole will of God, not only with part of it. The patient Job did not say that he could bear all the other misfortunes which befell him, if only he lost not his possessions, which were to be the heritage of his children. Again, after Almighty God tried him still further by even taking away his children, Job did not complain that all his other losses would have been as nothing if only his children had been spared. No, as a model of patience, he only prayed: "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." He was

content with the whole will of God, nor did he limit his patience. Christ speaks in *The Following of Christ* (Bk. III, c. 18): "Son, I came down from Heaven for thy salvation. I took upon Me thy miseries, not of necessity, but moved thereto by charity, that thou mayest learn patience, and bear without repining the miseries of this life." Christ is our model. "Learn of Me, for I am patient of heart."

Resolve, after the example of Jesus, to be patient in all things, on all occasions, and under all circumstances.

Conclusion: "Oh, how great thanks am I bound to return to Thee, O Lord, for having vouchsafed to show me and all the faithful a right and good way to Thy everlasting kingdom. For Thy life is our life, and by holy patience we walk on towards Thee, who art our crown." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 18).

MARCH 4

PATIENCE AND FALSE ACCUSATION

There is hardly anything more trying than to be accused falsely. Very often one is involved in a skein of charges, the very number of which might predispose others to believe them. Nothing but a long series of explanations can possibly disprove them. The injury to a good reputation, the falseness of the attacks, and the trouble of long and perhaps futile explanations, will surely prove a trial of patience. Perhaps too, some of the alleged accusations are true, though exaggerated. What is to be done without offending against patience? Attend to the following advice of St. Gregory: "Whenever you are 'justly accused' of a fault, humble yourself and candidly confess that you deserve more than the

accusation that is brought against you; but if the charge be false, excuse yourself meekly, denying your guilt, for you owe this to the truth, and the edification of your neighbor. But if, after your true and lawful excuse, they should continue to accuse you, trouble not yourself nor strive to have your excuse admitted; for, having discharged your duty to truth, you must also do the same to humility, by which means you neither offend against the care you ought to have of your reputation, nor the love you owe to peace, meekness of heart, and humility."

To leave ourselves and what we hold dear in the hands of God, is good policy. He has allowed opprobrium to come upon us, and if we bear it patiently, He will know how to bring good from the evil we are forced to endure. "Patience is necessary for you; that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise." (Hebr. X, 36). In fact, it is better to be patient than to enjoy a good reputation, provided we are not to blame for the loss of the latter. After all, we are only what we are before Almighty God. And He knows what we are, no matter what the opinion of the world is in our regard. The world is naturally suspicious, and almost everyone to a greater or lesser degree will some time in his life suffer from this suspicion, perhaps even false accusation. To be possessed with sufficient patience to bear this trial meekly will redound to the glory of God and to the good of one's own soul.

Resolve not to refute every charge made against you if neither the truth nor the good of some third party requires a refutation.

Conclusion: "Let us frequently call to mind that as Our Lord saved us by patient suffering, so we also ought to work out our salvation by sufferings and afflictions; enduring injuries and contradictions with all possible meekness."

MARCH 5

PATIENCE AND COMPLAINTS

Many are ready to bear wrongs patiently, that is they would never be tempted to complain of the good God who permits them; but they cannot forego the satisfaction of complaining of those through whom they come. Such murmuring robs the virtue of its value, in fact, it may be questioned if it then be patience at all. To complain of God would surely not enlist the sympathy of the good and God-loving. Hence the subterfuge is resorted to of complaining of those who inflict the wrong. This last mode of action is as reprehensible as complaining of God. St. Francis de Sales counsels: "Complain as little as possible of the wrongs which you suffer; for, commonly speaking, he that complains, sins, because self-love magnifies the injuries we suffer, and makes us believe them greater than they really are."

However, at times it may be good for the soul to impart these trials to others, patiently and without bitterness, so as to gain greater strength of soul to bear them. "Make no complaint to choleric or censorious persons; but, if complaints be necessary, either to remedy the offence or to restore quiet to your mind, let them be made to the meek and charitable, who truly love God; otherwise, instead of extracting the thorn, they will sink it the deeper." A trial imparted in confidence with another is easier to bear, but if borne without this palliative, the greater will be the honor to God and the greater the reward for the individual. Happy the man who has the understanding Heart of Jesus to go to

with his spiritual sufferings. Here is a source of strength and consolation that is inexhaustible. "Without a friend thou canst not well live; and if Jesus be not thy friend above all, thou will be indeed sad and desolate. Thou actest therefore like a fool if thou puttest thy trust or rejoicest in any other." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 8).

Resolve to complain to Jesus alone.

Conclusion: "To Thee, O Lord, I will cry, and I will pray to my God." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 9).

MARCH 6

PATIENCE IN SICKNESS

One of the severest trials of patience is sickness, especially long, protracted sickness. The bodily strength is reduced, pains and aches torment the patient, his freedom is hampered, and he depends on others in a way that is very humiliating. Not to complain, but to be resigned to the will of God at such times is patience in no mean degree. To be able to practice patience under such circumstances, it is necessary to pray for it while in health, and furthermore to practice it under small aches and pains so that a habit has been formed. We ought to accustom ourselves daily to offer up to God the slighter sufferings of the body, so that if more serious sickness comes, we shall more easily be able to bear it patiently. "In sickness offer up all your griefs and pains as a sacrifice to our Lord, and beseech Him to unite them with the torments He suffered for you. Obey your physician, take your medicine, food and other remedies, for the love of God, remembering the gall He took for your sake; desire to be cured, that you may serve Him, but refuse not to continue

sick, that you may obey Him; and dispose yourself for death, if it be His pleasure, that you may praise and enjoy Him forever."

There is a lurking danger for patience which must be sedulously avoided. Many on being sick, afflicted or injured by others, refrain from complaining or showing sensibility of what they suffer, lest it should appear that they lacked Christian fortitude and resignation to the will of God; but still they contrive diverse artifices, that others should not only pity and compassionate their sufferings and afflictions, but also admire their patience. Now this is not true patience, but rather disguised pride and subtle vanity. "They have glory," says the Apostle, "but not with God! The truly patient man neither complains nor desires to be pitied by others; he speaks of his sufferings with truth and sincerity, without murmuring, complaining, or aggravating the matter. He patiently receives condolence, unless he is pitied for an evil which he does not suffer, for then he modestly declares that he does not suffer on that account, and thus he continues peaceable betwixt truth and patience, acknowledging, but not complaining of, the evil."

Resolve to pray for and to acquire the habit of patience while in health, so as to be able to be patient in time of sickness.

Conclusion: "Lord, because Thou wert patient in Thy life-time, in this chiefly fulfilling the commandment of Thy Father, it is fitting that I, a wretched sinner, should, according to Thy will, bear all with patience, and as long as Thou pleasest, support the burden of this corruptible life for my salvation." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 18).

MARCH 7

PATIENCE WITH OUR NEIGHBOR

A true test of patience is the manner in which we conduct ourselves toward our neighbor. If at the least cross word or smallest injury we are enraged, it is a certain sign that our meekness is not sincere, but only apparent and artificial. "But these things are provoking," you say. There can be no practice of meekness where there is no provocation. Then and under such circumstances is precisely the time that patience is to be practiced. We must seek to live in peace with all men, even with such as may offend, injure, slander or calumniate us. Thus we follow the example of Christ. "That illustrious and holy patriarch Joseph, sending back his brethren from Egypt to his father's house, gave them this only advice: 'Be not angry with one another by the way.' (Gen. XIV, 29). I say the same to you; this wretched life is but a journey to the happy life to come; let us not, then, be angry with one another on the way, rather march on with the troop of our brethren and companions meekly, peaceably, and lovingly." "Forgive your enemies, do good to those who persecute you. Let not the sun go down on your anger with any one." These are Scriptural injunctions. Our peace of mind, our happiness in this life to a great extent, our eternal happiness as well, depend upon the patience with which we conduct ourselves toward our fellowman.

No more attractive example can be adduced than the example of Him who was meek of heart. He was patient with the ignorant populace and with the Apostles. He was meek under provoking injuries and wrongs. He resented the detractions and calumnies raised against Him only mildly

and sometimes not at all. And despite it all, He went about doing good to all. Only in striving to approach this model as closely as possible, will a man be genuinely patient. To be patient in imitation of and for Christ must be his determination. "How much soever and how often soever any adversity happeneth to him from anything created, [the truly patient man] accepteth it all with gratitude, as from the hand of God, and esteemeth it a great gain. For nothing, how little soever, that is suffered for Christ's sake, can pass without merit in the sight of God." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 19).

Resolve as soon as you perceive yourself guilty of an act of wrath, to repair the fault immediately by an act of meekness toward the same person against whom you were angry.

Conclusion: "O Jesus, let all exercises of tribulation become sweet and agreeable to me for Thy name's sake, for to suffer and to be afflicted for Thee is very healthful for my soul." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 19).

MARCH 8

PATIENCE AND CORRECTION

Those in a position of authority may often have occasion, as well as the duty, to correct others. Parents, employers, and teachers, by virtue of their office need to correct. "We must, indeed, resist evil and restrain the vices of those under our charge, constantly and courageously, but yet with meekness and compassion." The correction should proceed from reason rather than passion. Man is a reasonable being and will listen to reason, but the suspicion of coercion is resented. "Princes do honor to their people and make them rejoice exceedingly, when they visit them with a peaceable train;

but when they come at the head of armies, though it be for the common good, their visits are always disagreeable; for although they cause military discipline to be rigorously observed among their soldiers, yet they can never do it so effectually but that some disorders will always happen, by which the peasant will be the sufferer. In like manner, as long as Reason rules, and peaceably excercises chastisements, corrections, and reprehensions, although severely and exactly, every one loves and approves it; but when she brings anger, passion and rage, she rather makes herself feared than loved, and even her own disordered heart is always the sufferer."

The object of every correction should be the lasting betterment of the one corrected, or the amendment of some wrong, when that be possible. This object will mostly be gained only when the one at fault is convinced that the correction is sincerly intended for his good rather than that it is an outcrop of impatience. "You can catch more flies with a drop of honey than with a barrel of vinegar." You may effect more good with kind but earnest words than with a torrent of vituperation. Our Blessed Saviour was singularly patient and gentle with those about Him. His more forceful words were addressed only to those who were not of good will, insincere, "whitened sepulchers." He had the advantage of being able to judge their motives infallibly. We have no such security and hence should always choose the way of gentleness and meekness rather than that of severity and exactitude.

Resolve: When your mind is in a state of tranquillity, to supply yourself with meekness, speaking all your words and doing all your actions, little and great, in the mildest manner possible.

Conclusion: O God! We would have others strictly corrected, but are not willing to be corrected ourselves. Give us

patience with our neighbor, as Thou hast patience with us!

MARCH 9

ANGER

Anger is defined in the Catechism as sinful "when we fly into a passion at what displeases us, use insulting and even blasphemous language, or allow ourselves to be carried away by a desire of revenge." The passion is in itself indifferent, and may be used for good or bad. It is used wrongly when roused toward an object that does not deserve indignation, or in excess of the deserts of the provoking object, or when aroused more frequently than necessary. Hence our Blessed Saviour, having all passions perfectly under control, at times used anger for a good purpose and for the greater honor of His heavenly Father. Because of this fact we call a righteous anger, holy anger. For us, "it is better," says St. Austin, "to deny entrance to just and reasonable anger, than to admit it, be it ever so little; because, being once admitted, it is with difficulty driven out again; for it enters as a little twig, and in a moment becomes a beam; and if it can but once gain the night of us, and the sun set upon it, which the Apostle forbids, it turns into a hatred from which we scarce have any means to rid ourselves; for it nourishes itself under a thousand false pretexts, since there was never an angry man who thought his anger unjust."

Anger is a very common fault, and many given to it may ask: "How shall I overcome it?" You must speedily muster your forces at the first alarm—not violently, not tumultuously, but mildly, yet seriously; for as we hear the ushers in public halls and courts of justice crying *Silence*, yet make more noise than the whole assembly; so it frequently hap-

pens that, by violently attempting to restrain our anger, we stir up more trouble in our heart than wrath has excited before, and the heart, thus agitated, can be no longer master of itself. In order to overcome anger we must have recourse to prayer. For the words of anger let us substitute some fervent ejaculation, such as: "Lord, have mercy on me." But prayer as well as all other remedies against this evil must be used calmly, and not with violence. A firm determination elicited each morning by those who often offend in this regard, and a short examination on the point in the evening, if persisted in for any length of time, will not fail to bring betterment.

Resolve to be prepared to fight, if thou desirest to gain the victory. "Without fighting thou canst not gain the crown of patience." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 19).

Conclusion: "May Thy grace, O Lord, make that possible which seems impossible to me by nature." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 19).

MARCH 10

HUMILITY

Humility is the foundation of all virtues. "St. Gregory calls it the spring and root of all the other virtues. This metaphor of the root explains very well the properties and conditions of humility, for, in the words of St. Gregory, just as a flower draws all its freshness and beauty from the root, and quickly fades as soon as it is plucked, even so if any virtue whatsoever be separated from the root of humility, it presently withers and is quite lost. Again, as the root lies deep in the ground, and is trodden under foot, and has ordinarily neither beauty nor smell, yet is nevertheless the

principle of both the plant's life and nourishment; so humility makes the man who is humble love to lie hid, as it were, under ground, and to be trodden upon and to be despised." (*Christian Perfection,* Vol. II, p. 133).

The opposites of humility are pride and vainglory. Pride is an undue self-esteem. "We call that glory vain which we assume to ourselves, either for what is not in us, or for what is in us and belongs to us, but deserves not that we should glory in it."

True humility consists in holding what we are and what we possess at their proper value. It must neither depreciate the genuine good that is in us, nor exaggerate it. Humility is truth. To feign to be worse than we really are, is as bad as to pretend to be better than we are. In a word, humility establishes our proper relation to Almighty God. The comparison between God and man gives the keynote of humility. We well understand in that light that we are nothing. However, what we have received from God or with His grace been able to acquire, is something to be neither denied nor belittled, provided we always give due credit to the Divine Source from which it came. The model of humility is contained in the words of our Blessed Lady: "My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour; because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty has done great things to me, and holy is His name." (Luke I, 46 sq.). Strive for a true conception of humility and then practice it.

Resolve to say often: "In Thee will I glory and rejoice all the day; but, 'for myself I will glory in nothing, but my infirmities.'" (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 40).

Conclusion: "O my truth and mercy, my God! O Blessed Trinity! To Thee alone be all praise, honor, power, and glory, for ever and ever." (*Ibidem.*)

MARCH 11

EXTERIOR HUMILITY

A man may glory in being of a good family, in the beauty of his personal appearance, in fine clothing, in his manners, honors, rank, dignities. "All this is extremely vain, foolish and impertinent; and the glory which is raised on so weak foundations is justly esteemed vain and frivolous." These inheritances or acquirements are merely accidental. The real value of man is within. The matter of family, beauty of form or feature, are gifts of providence, for which he deserves no praise, as he could do nothing either to merit or to acquire them. Again fine clothing, good manners, honors, rank, dignities, although perhaps acquired through personal effort, are but the veneer; the true worth of a man is in his qualities of mind and heart. The externals are the tinsel of life, but what is its value in comparison to gold? The humble man is the man who estimates values at their real worth and, therefore, finds nothing to glory in when these mere externals are under consideration. He knows that God looks through all of these to the soul; the virtue in the soul is that on which God lays value. "The pursuit and love of virtue begin to make us virtuous; but the pursuit and love of honor make us contemptible and worthy of blame. Generous minds do not amuse themselves with the toys of rank, honor, and salutation; they have other things to do; such baubles belong to degenerate spirits." Honor is beautiful when freely given, it becomes base when exacted or sought after. "True goodness is proved like true balm; for as balm, when dropped into water, if it sinks and rests on the bot-

tom, is accounted the most excellent and precious; so if you would know if a man be truly wise, learned or generous, observe whether his qualifications tend to humility modesty, and submission; for then they shall be good indeed; but if they swim on the surface and strive to appear above water, they shall be so much the less true, in the same proportion as they appear." "Every one indeed may take and keep his own place without prejudice to humility, so that it be done carelessly and without contention."

Resolve never to strive for, or if it comes unsolicited, to receive with indifference any honor which may result from the endowments of nature or from good qualities gained through industry.

Conclusion: "This indeed I may truly think and say: Lord, I am nothing, I can do nothing, I have nothing of myself that is good; but I fail and am defective in all things." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 40).

MARCH 12

HUMILITY AND GOD'S BENEFITS TO MAN

A means of gaining the virtue of humility is earnest consideration of the manifold benefits God has showered upon us, and our poor use of them. "The more we know them, the more shall we love Him; and as the particular benefits He has conferred on us move us more powerfully than those that are common to others, so ought they be more attentively considered." God by His powerful grace may have allowed us to preserve our innocence from Baptism; are we paragons of sanctity as a consequence? Quite the contrary, many have

not even given credit where credit is due, not realizing that only by the grace of God could they preserve purity of heart for any length of time. Others may plainly discern how, through a powerful grace of God, they were prevented, or recalled before it was too late, from a path of sin, which would ultimately have caused their damnation, and they look upon the incident as one of the passing events of life without in any way showing increased zeal for a better life. Others have been given the grace of prayer, through which they delight in prayer; but what poor use they make of this gift! Some are favored with an environment which is calculated to encourage the practice of virtue, which has had but little effect upon them. To still others, time and opportunities are given for frequent attendance at holy Mass and frequent reception of the Sacraments, but they use these opportunities but rarely. Then there are those who are naturally gentle and kind, but do not employ these qualities for the benefit of their fellowmen. And yet most men possessed of these advantages are conscious of being favored over others, pride themselves on the fact, and take it as being their due, whereas Holy Writ tells us that "whatsoever there is good in us, is not of ourselves." "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory?" (1 Cor. IV, 7).

Resolve often to recall God's special graces to you, acknowledge the goodness of their Giver, deplore your unworthiness of them, and gratefully humble yourself because of your poor use of them.

Conclusion: "O God! All that we have in soul and body, all that we possess within or without, by nature or grace, are Thy benefits, and commend Thy bounty, mercy, and goodness, from whom we have received all good!" (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 22).

MARCH 13

FALSE HUMILITY

Words must be pictures of the thoughts that are in the mind. It is entirely wrong to speak words of humility, saying things derogatory to ourselves, representing ourselves to be nothing, unless our thoughts are conformable to what we say. A criterion of the sincerity of our words would be, if we would be pleased if others said these same things about us. If we could gladly hear others make such remarks about us without resentment, yes even with a conviction that they are true, we then, might have some reason to believe that words of a similar import spoken by us were genuine. But even here, there is the danger of affectation or ostentation. "My advice, therefore," says St. Francis de Sales, "is that we should either not accustom ourselves to words of humility, or else use them with a sincere interior sentiment, conformably to what we pronounce outwardly." In like manner with our actions or rather our omissions; to make no effort to practice mental prayer because that is for the more advanced in perfection, to omit Holy Communion because we are not perfect enough, not to use the talents God has given us, because we know our weakness, that tends to vainglory, is "nothing but an artificial kind of humility, false and malicious, whereby we tacitly and subtly seek to find fault with the things of God; or at least to conceal the love of our own opinion, humor and sloth, under the pretext of humility."

A mark of true humility is obedience; hence when God draws a soul to the knowledge of, and desire for, a more perfect and devout life, it is a work of humility to co-operate

with His grace, despite our conscious feeling of unworthiness. As the child who loves his parents is obedient not only to their express command, but also to their every wish, so the truly humble soul is eager and anxious to fulfill God's every design in its regard. There will be no danger of false humility if your every work, word, and deed, in so far as they are good and edifying, are attributed to the grace of God. "You must be on your guard in suffering yourself to be beguiled on any pretext whatsoever into the slightest complacency in yourself or your works. Let your complacency be in the Lord alone, in His mercy and in the works of His life and passion." (*The Spiritual Combat,* p. 164).

Resolution: "Think on thy sins with great compunction and sorrow, and never esteem thyself to be anything for thy good works." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 4).

Conclusion: O God! "if I humble myself, and acknowledge my own nothingness, and cast away all manner of self-esteem, and account myself to be, as I am, mere dust, Thy grace will be favorable to me, and Thy light will draw nigh to my heart; and all self-love, howsoever small, will be sunk in the depth of my own nothingness, and be lost forever." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 8).

MARCH 14

PRACTICAL HUMILITY

There are certain circumstances, moods, and actions of men which make them despicable in the sight of their neighbors. He would be considered despicable who, although a man of intellect and ability, could not earn enough to clothe himself decently. "You see a devout old hermit covered with

rags; everyone honors his tattered habit and compassionates his sufferings; but if a poor tradesman or a poor gentleman be in like clothing, the world despises and scoffs at him." There are times when such abjection is brought upon one entirely undeservedly or chosen voluntarily. To bear the contumely of the world without excuse, explanation or complaint is a fruit of true humility. A sharp reproof, perhaps undeserved, accepted meekly and without retaliation, is often construed as an act of a coward. How sweetly humble it is to leave this opinion of oneself stand with the consciousness that the rebuff was checked only for the love of God! To be disfigured by an accident, a wound or sickness, making us loathsome to the majority of men, what an act of humility, if suffered patiently without bitterness and without a desire of change. Incivilities, inadvertencies, and indiscretions, innocently enough committed, oftentimes without the least guilt of sin, are a daily source of humiliation. The confusion, embarrassment, and seeming stupidity thus exhibited, can be used to good effect in keeping us lowly and in our proper position towards God and our fellowman. "A young gentleman or lady who refuses to join in the disorders of a debauched company, or to talk, play, dance, drink, or dress as the rest do, will incur their scorn and censure; and their modesty will be termed bigotry or affectation; to love this is to love our own abjection."

To love abjection is to love humility. True humility is satisfied to be considered low, mean, and abject. It is the work of the truly devout not to engender such opinion in others purposely, but if found in them, not to remonstrate with God or men, nor to seek to remove it, provided no other virtue requires such remonstration or removal. Would that we were able to pray with the Psalmist: "I have chosen to be an abject in the house of God, rather than to dwell in the

tabernacles of sinners." (Ps. LXXXIII, 11). Many things have been said here which may seem hard in theory, but they will be more agreeable than sugar and honey when put into practice.

Resolution: Accept in particular those humiliations which befall you by accident or in consequence of your state of life, for you have not chosen them yourselves, but received them from God, whose choice is always better than your own.

Conclusion: "Because I have often and grievously sinned against Thee, all creatures have reason to take up arms against me. To me, therefore, confusion and contempt are justly due, but to Thee praise, honor, and glory." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, Ch. 41).

MARCH 15

HUMILITY AND GOOD NAME

Although humility demands that its possessor should regulate his relations to his fellowman, so as never to deem himself superior to any one, nevertheless humility does not preclude care to preserve a good name. "A good name is an esteem, not of an excellence, but only of ordinary honesty and integrity of life." Holy Writ itself advises us to "take care of a good name." (Eccl. LXI, 15).

Of itself a good name means little in the sight of Almighty God; the real value of a man is in his virtue. Yet for the sake of God's honor it is necessary to preserve a good name, for He says: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. V, 16). A good name is like the splendor of the virtue which is within, and when this splendor is hid-

den, the virtue is just as genuine in itself, yet it will have no effect upon those around us. Just as the sun, when hidden by a cloud, is no less the luminous body as when clear to view, still the light and heat otherwise effective for the comfort of men and the growth of vegetation are dulled and less perceptible. A good name, therefore, is desirable not so much for our own sakes, as for the sake of God's glory and the welfare of our fellowmen. For this reason it should be cultivated and prized, which may be done without prejudice to humility. It is possible to enjoy a good name without its being a true picture of what is within us. Care, therefore, must be exercised to be what our good name implies that we are. We must be actually such as we are thought to be. Granted that we are, "we must not be over-nice in regard to the preservation of our good name; for, those who are too tender and sensitive on this point, are like those persons who, for every slight indisposition, take medicine, and thinking to preserve their health, quite destroy it. Thus, persons by endeavoring to maintain their reputation so delicately, entirely lose it; for by this tenderness they become whimsical, quarrelsome, and insupportable, and thus provoke the malice of detractors." Hence the care of a good name is counselled, but its preservation is not so necessary as to demand its safeguarding under all circumstances, especially when neither the honor of God nor the good of our neighbor suffers detriment in such neglect.

Resolution: Seek a good name, but let it be the natural concomitant of a life of genuine virtue.

Conclusion: O Lord! "All the world will not move him whom truth hath established in humility. Neither will he be moved with the tongues of all that praise him, who has settled his whole hope in God." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c, 15).

MARCH 16

GOOD REPUTATION

One of the requirements of human society is that its members must enjoy a good reputation. In commercial as well as social intercourse, a good reputation is necessary to inspire confidence. A merchant must be reputed honest if his neighbors are to trade with him. A man must be considered righteous before the majority of his fellowmen will associate with him socially. However, "reputation is but a sign to point out the residence of virtue." Too often the sign belies the thing signified, like "the whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and all filthiness." Matt. XXIII, 27. "Where there is true virtue, good reputation will be a natural accompaniment. True, at times our good name may be dimmed or even lost for a while; but our dear Lord will be the protector of our good reputation; and, should He suffer it to be taken away from us, it will be either to restore it with advantage, or to make us profit in holy humility, one ounce of which is preferable to ten thousand pounds of honors."

Slander and calumny can affect reputation, but not the genuine virtue which is within us. As virtue is the root of a good reputation, so long as that remains in us, the honor due to it can always be recovered. Not so with the reputation which is destroyed by vice and a wicked life. Virtue being uprooted by these, a good reputation will hardly return, as there is no root from which to grow; however through repentance new seed is sown, and a new reputation

is grown. "Are we blamed unjustly, let us peaceably oppose truth against calumny; does the calumny continue, let us continue to humble ourselves, resigning our reputation together with our soul into the hands of God; we cannot secure it better." Should we be blamed justly, then let us by all means, remedy the causes for it, and start anew to acquire a good reputation for the honor and glory of God and for the edification and benefit of our neighbor. "The inhabitants of towns that have wooden bridges over great rivers fear lest they should be carried away by every little flood, but they that have bridges of stone only fear extraordinary inundations; so they that have a soul founded on Christian virtue despise the overflowing of injurious tongues; but those who find themselves weak, are disturbed by every discourse."

Resolve to serve God in evil and in good report. (Cfr. 2 Cor. VI, 8).

Conclusion: Hear our blessed Lord say to you: "Let not thy peace be in the tongues of men; for whether they put a good or bad construction on what thou dost, thou art not therefore a different man. Where is true peace and true glory? Is it not in Me?" (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 28).

MARCH 17

MISTAKEN VIRTUE

It is a delusion to think that fretting over our faults and imperfections is a virtue. Such action is a subtle form of pride and proceeds from self-love, "which is troubled and disquieted to see itself imperfect. We must be displeased

with our faults, but in a peaceable, settled, and firm manner." We must be patient with ourselves. To be so is a sign of genuine humility. Knowing our weakness we realize what we are without the aid of God. Of ourselves we continually stumble, and unless we hold securely to the hand of God, we must fail. "Without my grace you can do nothing," says Holy Writ. Our imperfections ought to bring us nearer to God, in as much as we experience the need of His saving grace, we will go to Him the more humbly and oftener, in prayer, for His aiding grace.

It is a mistaken course of action to be angry because we are angry, to be vexed because we are vexed. Thus the soul is in a continual condition of unrest. It is better, "when we have committed any fault, if we reprehend our heart with mild and calm remonstrances, having more compassion for it than passion against it, sweetly encouraging it to amendment, the repentance it shall conceive by this means will sink much deeper, and penetrate it much more effectually than a fretful, injurious, and stormy repentance."

A practice to be much recommended is to center our attention on the fault to which we are most prone and into which we most often fall, and day by day gently strive to eliminate this fault from our lives. In the beginning, despite our best efforts, we shall fall again and again. But day by day, "let us rise again. . . . let us call upon the mercy of God, and hope that He will assist us to be constant for the time to come, and let us enter again the path of humility. Let us be encouraged; let us from this day be more and more upon our guard. God will help us, we shall be better;" thus we must build a firm and constant resolution never more to relapse into that fault, using the proper means to avoid it adviced by our director. This we must do constantly, day by day, without discouragement, until in time

the fault is corrected. This is the path to true humility, conscious of one's own weakness, distrusting one's own strength, trusting all to the help of God's grace. "In Him I can do all things."

Resolve to raise up your soul whenever it falls, but gently and softly.

Conclusion: "O God! although Thou expose me to various temptations and adversities, yet all this Thou ordainest for my good, who art wont to prove Thy beloved servants a thousand ways. . . . In Thee, therefore, O Lord God, I put all my hope and refuge; in Thee I place all my tribulation and anguish." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 59).

MARCH 18

WORRY

All our daily actions, even such as concern our temporal welfare, should be performed with care and diligence. This care, however, must not deteriorate into worry.

Worry is a nervous condition, resulting from a lack of confidence, or more frequently the effect of petulance that cannot brook failure in anything attempted. No matter what the source, "no mental distress is a thing to be laughed at." (Bossuet). However, in all cases worry is unnecessary, and often times positively foolish, for many of the anticipated evils never occur; as St. Antony, the Hermit once said: "I am an old man and have had many troubles, but most of them never happened." Were we to trust in Divine Providence, there would never be reason for worry. "Labor quietly on your part to coöperate with His designs,

then you may be assured, that if you trust, as you ought in God, the success which shall come to you will be always that which is the most profitable for you, whether it appear good or bad according to your private judgment."

Remember too that it is commonly not the greater affairs of life which cause worry so much as the smaller ones, which cause anxiety because of their great number. "Imitate little children, who with one hand hold fast to their father, with the other gather strawberries or blackberries along the hedges; so you gathering and handling the goods of this world with one hand, must with the other always hold fast the hand of your Heavenly Father, turning yourself toward Him from time to time, to see if your actions or occupations be pleasing to Him. But above all things take heed that you never leave go His protecting hand, nor think to gather more; for should He forsake you, you will not be able to go a step farther without falling to the ground."

The best means of banishing worry is an all-embracing trust in the goodness of God, a pure intention which determines all things for His glory, and a resignation in all things to His divine will. Such as are able to adopt this attitude in the daily affairs of life, will not only live without worry, but have a joy in life which can be gained in no other way.

Resolve in all things to rely wholly on Divine Providence, through which alone you can obtain success.

Conclusion: "O God! I will receive with indifference from Thy hand good and evil, sweet and bitter, joy and sorrow, and give Thee thanks for all that happeneth to me. Keep me from all sin, and I will fear neither death nor hell." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 17).

MARCH 19

OBEDIENCE

Obedience is one of the principal means of attaining perfection. Obedience, chastity, and poverty are called the Evangelical Counsels and are usually vowed by those who enter religious communities. Aside from the observance of these virtues which is required from every Christian, there is a stricter observance which is voluntary for those who choose to strive for a higher degree of perfection. The latter is practiced by those who subject their will to a superior whom they would not otherwise be obliged to obey, who choose the single state with its restrictions rather than the married state, for the sake of Christ and in the interest of the work which they propose to do for Him; who give up their temporal goods, if possessed of any, and relinquish their rights to acquire or possess any property in the future.

Not everyone is called to practice these counsels; but everyone is obliged to be obedient to his spiritual authorities, such as the Pope, his bishop, and his pastor; to the civil authorities, as the rulers of his country and of his local community; to the domestic authorities, as his father and mother, master or husband. "You must then of necessity obey their commands; but to be perfect, follow their counsels also, nay, even their desires and inclinations, so far as charity and discretion will permit. Obey them when they order that which is agreeable, as to eat or to take recreation; for though there seems no great value to obey on such occasions, yet it would be a great fault to disobey. Obey them in indifferent things, as to wear this or that dress, to go one way or another, to sing or to be silent, and

this will be a very commendable obedience. Obey them in things hard, troublesome, and disagreeable; this will be a more perfect obedience. Obey, in fine, meekly without reply, readily without delay, cheerfully without repining, and above all, obey lovingly, for the love of Him who through His love for us made Himself obedient unto death, even to the death on the Cross, and who as St. Bernard says, rather chose to part with His life than His obedience." In order to learn this obedience, readily condescend to your equals and cheerfully accommodate yourself to the desires of your inferiors, in as far as respect for authority suffers no loss. "Happy are the obedient, for God will never suffer them to go astray."

Resolve to break thy own will and to yield thyself up to all subjection. (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 13).

Conclusion: "Mine eye hath spared thee because thy soul was precious in My sight, that thou mightest know My love, and be always thankful for My favor, and mightest give thyself continually to true subjection and humility, and bear with patience to be despised." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 13).

MARCH 20

CHASTITY

Chastity, that virtue which elevates man above his corrupted nature, is the fairest ornament of the human race. St. Francis de Sales calls it "the lily of the virtues, which makes man almost equal to the angels." And Father Chaignon says that chastity in the spiritual order is what verdure is to the fields in the natural order, the coloring to the flowers, luster to gold, brilliancy to precious stones. Its

beauty shines forth from those who practice it, serenity illumines their countenances, the peace and joy which they possess because of it is manifest in their lives. Wherefore Holy Scripture says: "Oh, how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory, the memory therefore is immortal, it is known both with God and with men." (Wisd. IV, 1). Man, says the Psalmist, was created only a little inferior to the angels. By reason of his body he is a little less than they. "For the corruptible body is a load upon the soul, and the earthly habitation presses down the mind." (Wisd. IX, 15). But chastity gives man a certain pre-eminence over the angels. As Cassian observes: "By the help of chastity we live in bodies as though we carried no flesh about us, being now transformed through it into pure spirits, according to these words of St. Paul: 'You live no longer in flesh, but in spirit.' "

The angels are pure by nature, having no bodies to tempt them to sin; but man is pure despite a body filled with concupiscence alluring him to sin. He is deserving, therefore, of more glory, since he lives the life of an angel, although hampered with a sensual body.

This virtue elicits the special love of Christ, who Christ is the highest model of purity. As He loves this virtue in Himself, He loves it in all who imitate Him. Witness His love of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose purity was the charm, as it were, which caused Him to come down from Heaven into her chaste bosom. Behold the tender caresses He lavished upon His chaste foster-father, St. Joseph. Consider the exceptional privileges enjoyed by St. John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Go through the category of all the saints and you will find that those pre-eminent for chastity received tokens of Christ's particular love. Surely, "he who loves cleanness of heart

. . . shall have the king for his friend." (Prov. XX, 11).

Resolve to keep always near to Jesus Christ crucified, both spiritually by meditation, and really by Holy Communion. For Christ is chaste and makest those chaste who delight in Him.

Conclusion: "Fight strongly for me, O Lord, and overcome these wicked beasts, I mean these alluring lusts, that peace may be made in Thy virtue, and the abundance of Thy praise may resound in Thy holy court, which is a clean conscience." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 23).

MARCH 21

HOW TO PRESERVE CHASTITY

Chastity is necessary for all. The married must live chastely according to their state; the unmarried must preserve their virginity both of body and heart as long as they are in the single state. "Chastity depends upon the heart as its source, yet regards the body as its subject; therefore, it may be lost as well by the exterior senses of the body as by the interior thoughts and desires of the heart. It is impurity to behold, to hear, to speak, to smell, or touch any immodest thing in which the heart entertains itself and takes pleasure."

Hence a guard must be placed not only over the heart, but also over each one of the senses. Without such restraint, not even prayer will be effective to preserve purity. If, however, the senses are assiduously guarded, prayer and the frequent reception of the Sacraments will make it comparatively easy to preserve this virtue according to our state of life.

Another necessary aid is to be discreet in the choice of

company. "Frequent not the company of immodest persons, especially if they be impudent, as is generally the case; these corrupted souls and infected hearts scarcely speak to any, either of the same or a different sex, without causing them to fall in some degree from purity; they have poison in their eyes and in their breath, like basilisks. On the contrary, keep company with the chaste and virtuous; often meditate upon and read holy things; for the word of God is chaste, and makes those also chaste who delight in it."

To exercise such constant restraint is no easy task. "The flesh will complain, but by the fervor of the spirit it shall be controlled. The old serpent will tempt and trouble thee, but by prayer he shall be put to flight; moreover, by keeping thyself always employed in useful labor, his access to thee shall be impeded." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 12). "All other passions are to be overcome by meeting them in open warfare, even at the risk of being wounded, and by challenging them again and again to battle, until we have subdued them. But we must not only refrain from exciting this vice of impurity, but carefully avoid everything which may have a tendency in any way to excite it. The temptation of the flesh is overcome, and impure passion mortified, by flight, not by open resistance."

Resolve to "go not after thy own concupiscence, but turn away from thy own will." (Eccl. XVIII, 30).

Conclusion: "O my God, according to the inner man I am delighted with Thy law, knowing Thy command to be good, just, and holy, and reproving all evil and sin as something to be shunned. Yet with the flesh I serve the law of sin, whilst I rather obey sensuality than reason. . . . Oh, how exceeding necessary is Thy grace for me, O Lord, to begin that which is good, to go forward and to accomplish it." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 55).

MARCH 22

POVERTY OF SPIRIT

Our dear Lord calls those blessed who are poor in spirit. It is incorrect to think that the possession of riches is a curse or that poverty is a blessing. There is a difference between having riches and having one's heart bound up in them, just as "there is a material difference between having poison and being poisoned. Apothecaries have almost all kinds of poisons for use on various occasions, and yet are not poisoned, because they have not poison in their bodies, but in their stores; so you may possess riches without being poisoned by them, if you keep them in your house or purse, and not in your heart. To be rich in effect and poor in affection is the greatest happiness of a Christian; for by this means he has the benefit of riches for this world and the merit of poverty for the world to come." On the other hand the poor man who is discontented, complaining, desirous of unreasonable possessions, although poor in effect, is not so in spirit, and is consequently neither happy in this life nor deserving of happiness in the next because of his poverty.

However, riches as well as poverty are dangerous in the spiritual life. The golden means is to have so much as not to suffer need, but not so much as to have a superfluity When there is too little, there is the temptation to discontent and sometimes even to dishonesty; when there is more than enough, there is danger of avarice and miserliness. For the poor in spirit there is the promise of Christ: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. V, 3). And for the rich who are not poor in spirit, there is the warning of Christ: "It is harder

for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Mark X, 25). Commentators on the Bible explain the "eye of a needle" as a low and narrow gate through the wall surrounding the city of Jerusalem. This explanation does not lessen the force of our Lord's words. The reason why the rich and the seekers for riches will find such difficulty in gaining Heaven is that they almost unconsciously fall a prey to covetousness. "No one ever acknowledges himself to be covetous; every one disavows that mean and base passion; every one excuses himself on account of having charge of children which oppresses him, and on that wisdom which requires that men should establish themselves in the world; he never has too much; some pretense is always found to procure more; nay, the most covetous deny that they are avaricious, and even believe they are not." Hence all the more reason to strive for the golden mean, and if blessed with riches, to strive with a sincere and earnest effort to be poor in spirit.

Resolve not to desire the wealth which you have not, and not to place your affection on that which you have; grieve not for the losses which may befall you.

Conclusion: Thou who art the truth hast plainly said: "Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also." (Matt. VI, 21). If I love the world, I rejoice in the prosperity of the world, and am troubled at its adversity; but blessed is the man who for Thee contemns all created things.

MARCH 23

POVERTY IN RICHES

Not to be attached to riches when possessed of them is

the task of every follower of Christ. To insure this detachment, it is well to become poor. "Deprive yourself frequently of some part of your property, by bestowing it upon the poor with a willing heart; for to give away what we have is to impoverish ourselves in proportion as we give; and the more we give, the poorer we become. It is true, God will repay us, not only in the next world, but even in this; for nothing makes us so prosperous in the world as alms; but until such time as God shall restore it to us, we remain so much the poorer by as much as we have given."

God does not always repay us in this world in kind, but the charitable will never want the necessities of life, and in addition will enjoy a happiness and contentment which the world and its goods can never give.

To love the poor makes us resemble the poor. We become like those with whom we associate. If we love the poor, we shall delight to be in their company, to entertain them, to speak to them, to have them near us in church, in the streets, wherever we may find them.

To dole out alms is not yet being detached from riches; with the alms must go the heart. There must be feeling and sympathy for the less fortunate, otherwise we resemble the publican, who thanked God that he was not like the rest of men because he fasted and gave alms. Often the poor when in trouble, sickness, or grief, need sympathetic service, even more than alms. When the rich,—I will not say condescend, for there is no condescension, as the poor are our brethren—adopt themselves to the needs of the poor, their action is perhaps more meritorious and pleasing to God than the alms which accompany such action. Thus we make ourselves poorer than the poor themselves, for we make ourselves the servants of the poor. "Go and serve them in their beds when they are sick; serve them with your own hands; prepare their food for them yourself and at

your own expense, . . . this service is more glorious than a kingdom." St. Francis de Sales assures us that: "Blessed are they who are poor in this manner, for to them belongs the Kingdom of Heaven. 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was naked and you clothed me; come, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,' He who is king of the poor as well as of kings, will say when He addresses Himself to the elect on the day of the general judgment."

Resolve to love and aid the poor, for, "whatsoever you do unto these, my least brethren, you did it to Me." (Matt. XXV, 40).

Conclusion: O God, who hast said: "Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor; the Lord will deliver him in the evil day;" (Ps. XL, 2) grant me a right understanding of the use of riches, and the will to devote them to your honor and glory, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

MARCH 24

DETACHMENT FROM RICHES

One of the surest signs of detachment from riches is the ability to suffer losses with equanimity. St. Francis illustrates this truth thus: Both Esau's and Jacob's hands were covered with hair; that of Esau adhered to his skin, whereas that of Jacob belonged not to his skin, but to his gloves. In the latter's case one might pluck out the hair without injury to Jacob, but in the other's, to pluck out his hair would have caused excessive pain. When our riches cleave to our hearts, as with Esau's hair, to remove them causes pain. Not so with those who are not attached to their

riches and possessions; losses from theft, fire, lawsuits are easily borne because the heart never attached itself to these things. The classic example in this regard is that of Job, who, after all his possessions had been taken from him, was able to say in all sincerity: "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." A genuine love of God will teach such conduct.

It matters not whether we serve God in riches or in poverty, the one thing necessary is to comply generously with His holy will. Moreover, no happiness is comparable to the joy of serving almighty God. This happiness may be experienced in poverty as much as in riches. These states are merely as an environment,—fidelity to God in either alone counts. Just as we may be faithful to God whether we live on the mountains or in the valleys, or at one time on the mountains and at another in the valleys, so too we may please God as well amidst poverty as in riches, or for a time in poverty and then in wealth. These are only outward circumstances; the love of God is in the heart, which these accidents cannot of themselves affect. Their influence may be good or pernicious only so far as they are allowed entry into the heart. In the possession of riches, be not too solicitous to retain them, remembering that in poverty also it is possible, and sometimes very pleasing to God, to serve Him. "Beware lest self-love deceive you; for sometimes it counterfeits the love of God so closely that one would imagine it to be the same. That it may not deceive you, and that the care of your temporal goods may not degenerate into covetousness, practice real poverty in the midst of all the riches that God has given you." Be grateful for and conscientiously use the possessions God has blessed you with; suffer what losses may come to you with equanimity; be satisfied and praise God if reduced to poverty.

Resolve to not be drawn away by temporal things to cleave to them, but rather to draw these things to that end for which they were ordained by God. (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, 38).

Conclusion: "Lord, I willingly commit all things to Thee; for my care can profit little. Would I were not too much set upon future events, but offered myself with all readiness to Thy good pleasure." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 39).

MARCH 25

REAL POVERTY

A poor person may not be poor in spirit and consequently lose all the spiritual advantages of poverty. "If you are actually poor, be likewise, for God's sake, actually poor in spirit: make a virtue of necessity." Those who are actually poor are also poor in spirit, if they are content with their lot in life, because they know that it is the will of God that they should be poor, as it is through no fault of their own; or, knowing that their poverty is the result of mismanagement, lack of thrift, extravagance, they accept it as a just retribution, without bitterness or complaint. This contentment with their condition does not kill their ambition, or enterprise to better their condition; only all their efforts are confidently left in the hands of the good God. If they succeed, God is thanked; if they fail, God is equally praised.

The great need in connection with poverty is patience. Despite earnest efforts, a great portion, sometimes all of one's life is spent in poverty. This was the lot of our Blessed Saviour, His blessed Mother, St. Joseph, and many of the

saints. The very great advantages of this state are clearly evinced from the fact that our Lord chose this condition for Himself and for those who were nearest and dearest to Him. He might have been rich and mighty upon the earth; He might easily have made His friends so; but He chose the humble state of poverty to give a good example, and to teach that poverty, properly borne, is more conducive to sanctity than riches. In imitation of Him many of the saints voluntarily chose this state, for the spiritual advantages they discerned in it.

If you are actually poor, behold this holy Poverty, more gracious toward you than to those who have chosen it voluntarily, comes to present herself to you in your own lodging. "You have met her without the trouble of seeking after her; embrace her, then, as the dear friend of Jesus Christ, who was born, who lived, and who died in poverty. Poverty was His nurse during the whole course of His life." Those who are poor in spirit as well as actually, must be satisfied to receive rather than to give, to be assisted rather than to relieve. "To be willing to be poor, but not to bear the hardships of poverty, is to desire the honor of poverty with the convenience of riches." "Complain not, then, of your poverty; for we never complain but of that which displeases us; and if poverty displeases you, you are no longer poor in spirit, but rich in affection."

Resolve to be as ready to suffer as to rejoice; to be as willing to be poor and needy as to be full and rich. (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 17).

Conclusion: "Lord, I will suffer willingly for Thee whatsoever Thou art pleased should befall me. I will receive with indifference from Thy hand good and evil, sweet and bitter, joy and sorrow, and will give Thee thanks for all that happeneth to me." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 17).

MARCH 26

FRIENDSHIP

"Love holds the first place among the several passions of the soul; it is the sovereign of all the motions of the heart; it directs all the rest toward it, and makes us like the object of our love." When the object of our love is a human being, and the love is mutual, a friendship is formed. Friendship demands a communication as the ground of friendship. This communication gives character to the friendship. If the communication is noble, the love and friendship are noble; if the communication is false and vain, the friendship is false and vain.

Communication which reacts to the mutual betterment of the friends is plainly a good friendship. Communication which results in a detriment to those concerned is evidently a bad friendship. Communication which is a danger to those who are intimate is a dangerous friendship. Friendships that are founded on an appreciation of high spiritual qualities of soul, and whose communication, one to the other, is a result of such friendship, are the noblest of all. They have the tendency of bringing their participants nearer to God. Those friendships which merely afford social intercourse are indifferent, as they have in themselves nothing wrong nor much of good; moreover they may be elevated to something better. Those "which are grounded on curled locks, a fine head of hair, smiling glances, fine clothes, affected countenances, and idle talk," are mostly sensual, vain and frivolous. Such are the ordinary friendships of young people. Lacking experience, they judge that: "Such a gentle-

man has many virtues and perfections, for he dances gracefully, plays well at all sorts of games, dresses fashionably, sings delightfully, speaks eloquently, and has a fine appearance." These are mere external attractions, which may coexist with a depraved and unattractive interior.

An examination of our friendships and a scrutiny of their motives from time to time is very wise. Friendships based on the spiritual ought to be fostered. Social friendships ought to be engaged in as far as they are necessary. Vain, frivolous, and sensual friendships should be banished, as they are not only dangerous, but at times positively sinful.

Resolve to associate thyself with the humble and simple, with the devout and obedient, and treat of those things which are for edification. (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 8).

Conclusion: "Give me, O Lord, heavenly wisdom, that I may learn above all things to seek Thee and find Thee, above all things to relish Thee and to love Thee, and to understand all other things as they are, according to the order of Thy wisdom." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 27).

MARCH 27

DANGEROUS FRIENDSHIPS

Intimate friendships maintained between persons of different sexes without pretensions of marriage are dangerous. For those already married or such as do not seriously contemplate marriage the words of St. Gregory Nazianzen, addressed to women but applicable to men as well, are very

apropos. He says: "He shall be pleasing to thee who shall please himself with thy beauty; thou wilt return him glance for glance, look for look; presently will follow smiles and little amorous words, dropt by stealth at the beginning, but soon after they will become more familiar, and pass to an open courtship. Take heed, my tongue, of telling what will follow: yet will I say this one truth: nothing of all those things which young men and women say and do together in these foolish complacencies is exempted from grievous stings. All the links of wanton loves depend on one another, and follow one another as one piece of iron touched by the loadstone, draws many others after it."

Of course such courtship as here described is sinful, for in the one case one of the parties involved is married and in the other case, although the persons be single and able to marry, there is no serious intention of doing so. Those who engage in such friendships, as a rule, intend no evil at their inception. They intend only to admit some of this love, but not too much. But they deceive themselves. "O foolish and senseless people! think you to charm love in such a manner as to be able to manage it at pleasure? You would play with it, but it will sting and torment you cruelly; and do you know that everyone will mock and deride you for attempting to charm or to tie down love, and on a false assurance put into your bosom a dangerous serpent, which has spoiled and destroyed both your soul and your honor?" The result will be that those entrapped in the entanglements of such friendship serious injury to their souls. "Their idle talk, their amusements, and their dalliance, are so frequent, that all leisure time is squandered away in them; and they engender so many temptations, distractions, suspicions, and other evil consequences, that the whole heart is trampled down and destroyed by them. In a word,

these fond loves not only banish heavenly love, but also the fear of God; they waste the spirit and ruin reputation."

Resolve to have charity for all, but familiarity with none.

Conclusion: "O Lord! free me from evil passions, and heal my mind from all disorderly affections, that, being healed and well purified in my interior, I may become fit to love, courageous to suffer, and constant to persevere." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 5).

MARCH 28

TRUE FRIENDSHIP

"Perfection consists not in having many friends, but in having none but such as are good and holy." The best friendship is that which is based on the love of God. Communication with one or more persons of such disposition as will promote the love of God in our own hearts as well as in the hearts of those with whom we associate, is the excellence of friendship. The imparting of one's devotion and spiritual experience to a selected one or a few, with the motive of benefiting others and of being benefited by them, creates a bond similar to that which joins the heavenly inhabitants.

When the disciples on the way to Emmaus were conversing with the Lord, whom they did not recognize at the time, their hearts grew warm with spiritual delight in hearing this seeming Stranger expatiate on the sublime subject which had been the topic of their conversation, as well as at the ardor and evident love of God with which He spoke. Thus, will the unction of God's love flow from one friend to an-

other when the friendship is truly a holy one. "Make no other kind of friendship than this: I speak of such friends as you choose yourself; but you must not, therefore, forsake or neglect the friendships which nature or former duties oblige you to cultivate with your parents, kindred, benefactors, neighbors, and others."

Many of these obligatory friendships may be raised to the plane here advocated. In fact, one of the benefits of the Sacrament of Matrimony is this very communication of spiritual aid, whereby a husband becomes a help to his wife, and a wife to her husband, in gaining a greater love of God and mutually benefiting the other's soul. The same love and spiritual communication is possible between parents and their children. This love transcends the merely natural affections. The advice is given: "Love every one with a strenuous love of charity, but have no friendship except for those who communicate with you the things of virtue: and the more exquisite are the virtues which shall be the matter of your communications, the more perfect shall your virtues also be." The author of *The Following of Christ* says on this subject: "Devout conferences on spiritual things help very much to spiritual progress, especially where persons of the same mind and spirit are associated together in God." (Bk. I, c. 10).

Resolve to "discover not thy heart to everyone" (Eccl. VIII, 22), but reveal thy affairs only to those who are wise and fear God.

Conclusion: "In Me the love of thy friend must stand; and for Me he is to be loved, whoever he be that appeareth to thee good and very dear to thee in this life. Without Me no friendship is of any strength, nor will be durable; nor is that love true and pure which is not united by Me." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 42).

MARCH 29

PARTICULAR FRIENDSHIPS

We sometimes read in devout books that, friendships in which we single out one or a few persons for intimate association are dangerous and to be avoided. This is undoubtedly true for those living in religious communities, "as in a well-ordered monastery, where the common design of all tends to true devotion, it is not requisite to make these particular communications of friendship, lest by seeking among individuals for that which is common to the whole, they should fall from particularities to partialities." However, for those in the world friendships between such as are of like mind and have the same aims are a prop and a bulwark against worldliness and an aid to, and a preserver of spirituality. It is always supposed that the friendship is a virtuous one, as already explained.

Our Lord himself singled out St. John, Lazarus, and his sisters, for his special love, to their great gain and advancement in spirituality. St. Peter had his Mark, St. Paul his Timothy. The loyal friendships of St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Basil, of Damon and Pythias are historical, and the good effects drawn from them are undeniable. "For those who dwell among worldlings and desire to embrace true virtue, it is necessary to unite themselves together by a holy and sacred friendship, since by this means they encourage, assist, and conduct each other to good."

But there is a danger which must be guarded against, namely, of friendship deteriorating into something merely sentimental and even sensual. Friendships thus degenerat-

ing from the high ideal lose their savor and no longer can be compared to the friendships of Jesus and His saints. "If thou placest thy peace in any person, for the sake of thy contentment in his company, thou shalt be unsettled and entangled. . . . Without Me no friendship is of any strength, nor will it be durable; nor is that true love and pure which is not united by Me." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 42).

Resolve to "associate thyself with the humble and simple, with the devout and virtuous, and treat of those things which are for edification." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 8).

Conclusion: "Thou makest us to think well of all, and praise Thee in all things; nor can anything without Thee give any lasting pleasure; but to make it agreeable and relishing, Thy grace must be present, and it must be seasoned with the seasoning of Thy wisdom." Give us, O Lord, Thy grace and Thy wisdom. (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 34).

MARCH 30

EVIL FRIENDSHIPS

Evil friendships are such as are the occasion of sin, particularly between persons of different sexes. "The devil often effects a change in those that love; they begin with virtuous love, with which, if not attended to with the utmost discretion, fond love will begin to mingle, then sensual love, and afterwards carnal love." The need of caution and watchfulness, therefore, is at once evident. A merely worldly friendship which may with caution be kept innocent, but lacking caution often develops into an evil friendship, may

be distinguished from a holy friendship thus: "Worldly friendship ordinarily produces a great profusion of endearing words, passionate expressions, with admiration of beauty, behavior, and other sensual qualities. Holy friendship, on the contrary, speaks a plain and sincere language, and commends nothing but virtue and the grace of God, the only foundation on which it subsists." Let no one deceive himself. A holy friendship, if genuine, will increase the love of God in the hearts of the friends, whereas an evil friendship will soon disclose itself by the many faults and at first slighter sins which will be committed when the friends are together. Finally, the delusion is discovered, when serious temptation asserts itself or grievous sin is committed. "Young people who use gestures, glances, and caresses, or speak words in which they would not willingly be surprised by their fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, or confessors, testify thereby that they are doing something contrary to honor and conscience." Hence the author of *The Imitation* warns earnestly in words attributed to Christ: "In Me the love of thy friend must stand; and for Me he is to be loved, whoever he be that appeareth to thee good, and is very dear to thee in this life. Without Me no friendship is of any strength, nor will be durable; nor is that love true and pure which is not united by Me." (Bk. III, c. 42). Christ's friendships are models for ours. His friends always improved by associating with Him. They were drawn, almost unconsciously, by His communications, to a greater love of God. When our friendships have this characteristic of drawing us and our friends nearer to God, they are good friendships and to be cultivated. But when we find that they are the occasions of sin or temptations, for us, they are to be broken off.

Resolve to avoid worldly company, useless conversations, and those overflowings and attachments of the heart

which are neither regulated nor governed by the law of God.

Conclusion: "O Lord God! Free me from evil passions, and heal my mind from all disorderly affections; that, being healed and well purified in my interior, I may become fit to love, courageous to suffer, and constant to persevere." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 5).

MARCH 31

AIDS AGAINST EVIL FRIENDSHIPS

If a friendship is recognized as dangerous, the first aid to safety from temptation and sin is to flee the companionship of such persons, even at the risk of being considered rude and uncivil; for in these cases to compromise is to dally with temptation. "I call upon every one who has fallen into these snares: cut them—break them—tear them; do not amuse yourself in unravelling these criminal friendships; you must tear and rend them asunder; do not untie the knots, but break or cut them, so that the cords and strings may be rendered useless." A friendship, therefore that is sinful or even dangerous must be ended abruptly, if it is to be ended at all.

One method suggested is to withdraw yourself, if possible, from your present surroundings. "Change of place contributes very much to allay the heat and pains of grief or love." Where this is impossible, the friend or friends who prove a serious danger for us, must be unhesitatingly avoided. Evil is very often drunk into the soul through the ears, hence those in danger must put themselves out of range of hearing. The sirens of mythology were sea

nymphs, who with their sweet voices enticed sailors ashore and then killed them. Similarly evil companions entice those who will associate with them into sin and thus kill the soul. It were folly for any one, recognizing such a danger, to do anything but flee the presence of such evil companions.

More difficult is it for those who have not realized the danger and, unwittingly perhaps, fall into the snare of evil companionship. There may seem to be a hundred reasons for not terminating such innocently begun friendships. But here again there is but one mode of procedure—the friendship must be broken. "Will it not be ingratitude to break off a friendship so unmercifully? Oh, how happy that ingratitude which makes us pleasing to God! . . . I tell you in the name of God, this will be no ingratitude, but a great benefit which you shall confer upon your lover; because, in breaking your own bonds asunder, you shall also break his, since they were common to you both; and though for the present he may not be sensible of his happiness, yet he will soon acknowledge it, and exclaim with you in thanksgiving: 'O Lord, Thou hast broken my bonds, I will sacrifice to Thee a sacrifice of praise, and call upon Thy holy name.'" (Ps. CXV).

Resolve, "as soon as you perceive the first approach of danger in any friendship, to turn suddenly away, with absolute horror and detestation, to run to the cross of your Saviour, to take the crown of thorns and to press it to your heart, so that the evil spirit may not come near it."

Conclusion: "O God! let me love Thee more than myself, and myself only for Thee, and all others in Thee who truly love Thee, as the law of love commandeth which shineth forth from Thee." (*The Folowing of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 5).

APRIL 1

ADVICE ON FRIENDSHIP

The communications of friendship being so intimate, there is a possibility that with the genuine benefits of friendship imperfections may also be imbibed. The ordinary man is imperfect, the saints are those least imperfect. Hence all have some imperfections to communicate to their fellowmen. It is the part of friendship to strive not to impart imperfections, and to avoid receiving into the soul imperfections along with the friendship of others. "We often see husbands, wives, children and friends, who, having a great esteem for their friends, parents, husbands and wives, acquire, either by condescension or imitation, a thousand little ill-humors in their communication of friendship. Now, this should not be so by any means, for every one has evil inclinations enough of his own, without charging himself with those of others; and friendship is so far from requiring it that, on the contrary, it obliges us mutually to assist one another, in order to free ourselves from all kind of imperfections." If it be a matter of sin, there is all the more need of caution neither to be accessory to, nor receptive of, an occasion of sin. A friendship which is an occasion of sin for its participants can be neither good nor helpful. Although the sins be not of the more serious and grosser kind, a friendship making a man less perfect rather than aiding him to become more perfect, is detrimental and, therefore, must either be purified or relinquished.

Sin may almost insensibly insinuate itself into the best of friendships. Much charity is required at all times to avoid this danger, but it is especially required when there is

intimate communication. "If it be an occasional slight sin, friendship will presently put it to flight by correction; but if it be habitual, and take up its habitation, friendship immediately perishes." As in all things, the fear of God must always rule us, and in the words of Holy Writ: "He that feareth God shall likewise have a good friendship." As those who seek gold on the banks of a river sift out the sand and retain only the gold, so we must retain only that which is good from the friendships we enjoy and let not imperfections or sins enter our souls.

Resolve "never to commit sin for the sake of friendship."

Conclusion: "Who is the man that is able to keep himself so warily, and with so much circumspection in all things, as not to fall sometimes into deceit or perplexity? But he that trusts in Thee, O Lord, and seeks Thee with a simple heart, doth not so easily fall." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 45).

APRIL 2

EXTERIOR MORTIFICATION

By exterior mortification is here meant fasting, abstinence, and other works of penance, which consist chiefly in the chastisement of the body. Although this mortification is not to be thought of lightly, nevertheless the reform of a man must begin with his heart. "He that has gained the heart has gained the whole man." In a fit of remorse to punish the body without making equally strenuous efforts to correct the sinful inclinations of the soul, is of little avail. St. Francis says: "You afflict the body; but it cannot remedy the evil, nor is it on that account that God's sword is drawn against you; correct your heart. . . . A man per-

ceives himself frequently relapsing in a shameful manner into the sin of impurity; an inward remorse assails his conscience, and his heart returning to itself, he says, 'Ah wicked flesh! ah, treacherous body! thou hast betrayed me.' and immediately he inflicts great blows on his flesh, with immoderate fasting, excessive discipline, and insupportable hairshirts. O poor soul! If thy flesh could speak, it would say to thee: 'Why, O wretch, dost thou strike me? It is against thee, O my soul! that God arms His vengeance; it is thou that art the criminal; why dost thou lead me into bad company? Why dost thou employ my eyes, hands, and lips in wantonness? Why dost thou trouble me with impure imaginations? Cherish good thoughts, modest and chaste, and I shall not be prevoked to lust. It is thou, alas, that castest smoke into my eyes and yet wouldst not have them inflamed; thou throwest me into the fire and yet wouldst not have me burn. And God, without doubt, says to you in these cases; 'Beat, break, rend and crush your heart to pieces, because it is against it principally that My anger is excited.' Although to remedy our vices, it may be good to mortify the flesh, yet it is still more necessary to purify our affections and to refresh our hearts." Hence our Lord through the prophet Joel admonishes: "Be converted to Me with your whole heart." Our first attention must, therefore, be given to the heart, then exterior mortification will flow from it naturally with wisdom and discretion.

Resolve to purify your heart, and the effect will show itself in all your exterior actions.

Conclusion: "Conform in all things thy desire to God's good pleasure; and be not a lover of thyself but earnestly zealous that God's will may be done. Desires often inflame thee, and violently hurry thee on; but consider whether it be for God's honor or thy own interest, that thou art moved." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 11).

APRIL 3

FASTING

After a genuine reform has been inaugurated in the heart, acts of exterior mortification will quickly follow. One of the most efficacious works of mortification is fasting. Fasting is calculated "to elevate the spirit, to keep the flesh in subjection, to exercise virtue, and to acquire a greater reward in Heaven; it is a great means to restrain gluttony, and to keep the sensual appetite and body subject to the law of the spirit."

St. Jerome says: "Long and immoderate fasting displeases me greatly, especially in those that are yet in their tender age." However, by these words he does not intend to condemn all fasting. Moderation is what is required. Those who can fast without detriment to their health, ought, according to the prudent discretion of a spirtual director, keep the fasts ordered by the Church. "We are greatly exposed to temptation, both when our body is too pampered, and when it is too much weakened, for the one makes it insolent with ease, and the other desperate with affliction."

St. Teresa was wont to say, when the devil suggested that she was ruining her health by works of mortification, that her death was of no consequence. And she adds: "I saw clearly that in most things, though I was really very sickly, it was either a temptation of Satan or a weakness on my part. My health has been much better since I have ceased to look after my ease and comfort." (*Autobiography,* Ch. XIII, p. 95).

"Although we may not fast much, yet the enemy fears us when he discovers that we know how to fast." Holy Writ

frequently recommends fasting saying that some works are impossible except by prayer and fasting. The saints, realizing the efficacy of fasting assiduously, practiced this mode of mortification. In our days, when the practice of fasting is fast falling into desuetude, it should be remembered that not fasting itself is to be condemned, but rather an imprudent and indiscrete use of an otherwise good work is to be deplored. The abolition of fasting is not to be advocated, but rather a moderate and judicious use of this very salutary practice ought to be encouraged. But let us never undertake corporal austerities without the advice of our spiritual director.

Resolve "some days to fast, as far as your devotion and the discretion of your director advise you."

Conclusion: "Behold! eating, drinking, clothing, and other necessaries appertaining to the support of the body, are burdensome to a fervent soul. Grant that I may use such things with moderation, and not be entangled with an inordinate desire for them." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 26).

APRIL 4

ABSTINENCE

Abstinence should here be understood in the sense of abstaining from any kind of food or drink, or from the pleasure arising from the taste of certain kinds of food, out of a spirit of mortification. Fasting consists in limiting the quantity of food taken, abstinence in disregarding the kind or quality. "We should attend with great reverence to the words of our Lord spoken to His disciples (Luke X, 9): 'Eat the things that are set before you.' It is, in my opinion, a greater virtue

to eat, without choice, that which is laid before you and in the same order as it is presented, whether it be more or less agreeable to your taste, than always to choose the worst; for although this latter way of living seems more austere, yet the former has, notwithstanding, more resignation, since by it we renounce not only our own taste, but even our own choice, and it is no small mortification to accommodate our taste to every kind of food and keep it in subjugation to all occurrences."

This form of mortification has the advantage of being possible to all, rich and poor, healthy and sick, young and old. The limiting ourselves in the use of certain kinds of food, while taking enough of other foods as to have a sufficient meal; the preference of certain kinds of food to others perhaps more delectable, through a spirit of penance, will not be injurious to the health. Furthermore this act of mortification may be practiced frequently, even at every meal. Moreover, it may be done without ostentation, for the choice of foods and the limits of indulgence is a matter of each one's personal liberty. St. Francis in his characteristic reasonableness admonishes: "Eat that which is set before you. I except, however, such foods as may prejudice the health or incommode the spirit, such as hot and highly-seasoned meats, as also certain occasions, in which nature requires recreation and assistance in order to be able to support some labor for the glory of God." A continual and moderate practice of this work of mortification, after the above exception has been made, is preferable to occasional and violent abstinences.

Resolve to eat what is set before you.

Conclusion. "Behold in the cross, is all, and in dying to thyself all consists; and there is no other way to life, and true internal peace, but the way of the holy cross and of daily mortification." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 12)

APRIL 5

LABOR

Labor is a duty imposed upon man after the Fall. It means not only manual, but intellectual work as well. Any useful occupation will answer this obligation. Some have no choice, but must literally earn their bread by the sweat of their brows, *i. e.*, by manual labor; others have a livelihood without the need of labor, but these also must occupy themselves to avoid idleness, which is the mother of temptation.

Far from being a burden, labor is a blessing. To labor conscientiously brings happiness, so much so that, many make labor their religion. "Labor, as well as fasting, serves to mortify and subdue the flesh. Now, provided the labor you undertake contributes to the glory of God and your own welfare, I would prefer that you should suffer the pain of labor rather than that of fasting." Hence the father or mother of a family who, because of hard work, cannot stand the strain of fasting, if they undertake their daily duties for the glory of God, are in a position to gain as much merit as those who, due to their positions, are able and bound to fast. Labor, aside from its being at times a substitute for fasting, is an excellent means of mortification, and, if undertaken for the sake of banishing idleness, it is a bulwark against temptation and sin. Idleness is the devil's workshop, but the mind that is occupied with labor will have little room for the suggestions of the evil one; moreover, it will keep the laborer from sinful recreations. There is the advantage, too, of furnishing wholesome thoughts about the work in hand when not actually engaged therein, another means of preventing and banishing sinful thoughts.

Happy then, the man who, when it is not absolutely an obligation imposed by necessity, labors with the intention of usefully employing his time. He will find pleasure in his work, and if he offers it to Almighty God, will gain a great reward.

If at times work appears irksome, this very fact furnishes the mortification and the penance we need.

Still more blessed is the man who can perform such labor as is directly for God or the Church. "Some find it painful to fast, others to serve the sick or visit prisoners and to perform similar exercises; these last pains are of more value than the former; for besides subduing the body, they produce much more desirable fruits."

Resolve to make your life a life of labor, a service to God and your fellowman.

Conclusion: "Come to me all ye that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." (Matt. XI, 28).

APRIL 6

SOLITUDE

We ought neither to seek nor to avoid solitude. Living in the world, although the pious soul is not of it, there is an obligation to society which demands that we associate with our fellowmen. The love of our neighbor, civility, and the very dictates of our nature require such intercourse.

However, solitude has its advantages. The voice of God makes itself heard in the repose and silence of the soul. It shrinks from noise and is silent amidst agitation. "The Lord is not in the earthquake." (3 Kings XIX, 11). "If, then, nothing obliges you to go into company, or to receive company at home, remain alone and entertain yourself with your

own heart; but if company visits you, or any just cause invites you into company, go in God's name and see your neighbor with a benevolent heart and a good intention." The greatest saints avoided the company of men as much as they could, and chose to live to God in secret. "As often as I have been amongst men, I have returned less a man." (Seneca, *Epist.*, 7). It is difficult to "associate with men and avoid all sin. The safest way is to "associate thyself with the humble and simple, with the devout and virtuous, and to treat those things which may be for edification." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 8). "Converse frequently with such persons who will be to you of the utmost benefit. As the vine that is planted amongst olive trees produces oily grapes, which have the taste of olives, so the soul which is frequently in the company of virtuous people cannot but partake of their qualities. As drones cannot make honey without the assistance of the bees, so it is of great advantage to us in the exercise of devotion to converse with those who are devout." The author of the, *The Following of Christ* warns that "it is easier to keep retired at home than to be able to be sufficiently upon one's guard abroad. Whosoever, therefore, aims at arriving at internal and spiritual things, must with Jesus, go aside from the crowd. No man is secure in appearing abroad, but he who would willingly be hidden at home." (Bk. I, 3, 20).

Resolve to seek a proper time to retire into thyself, and often think of the benefits of God." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 20).

Conclusion: "O, how good a thing, and how peaceable it is to be silent of others, nor to believe all that is said, nor to report what one has heard; to lay one's self open to a few; always to seek thee, the Beholder of the heart and not to be carried about by every wind of words; but to wish that all things both within and without us may go according to the

pleasure of Thy will." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 45).

APRIL 7

CONVERSATION

The words of the Apostle St. James are very remarkable: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." They show the care that must be exercised in conversation lest we sin in it. The author of *The Following of Christ* puts it in this way: "It is easier to be altogether silent than not to exceed in words." (Bk. I, c. 20); and: "No man securely speaks, but he who loves to hold his peace."

However, a man living in the world may not be altogether silent; he has obligations to be sociable as well as civil. He must at times take recreation, which he commonly does by associating with others. Thus there will be conversations, "merely to recreate and divert us from our serious occupations, to which we must not be too much addicted, although we may allow them to occupy the leisure destined for recreation. Other conversations have civility for their object, as in the case of mutual visits, and certain assemblies made to honor our neighbor. With respect to these, as we ought not to be superstitious in the practice of them, so neither must we be uncivil in condemning them, but modestly comply with our duty in their regard, so that we may equally avoid ill-breeding and levity."

Conversations that are bad must be unconditionally avoided. "We call such conversations bad which are held with an evil intent, or when the company is vicious, indiscreet, and dissolute." The ideal would be to engage in such conversations only which in some way can be turned to our

own and to our neighbor's spiritual advantage. The topics need not necessarily be of a spiritual nature, but the intention governing them should be such as to benefit ourselves or our neighbor. Thus our conversation by its cheerfulness, modesty, simplicity, and sincerity can cheer, comfort, edify, inform, and elevate our brethren, and the reaction of such words will have the same effect on ourselves. Moreover, when the topics of conversation are things rather than persons, much of the danger of sinning is excluded.

Resolve "to withdraw thyself from superfluous talk and idle visits, as also from giving ear to news and rumors, and you will have time sufficient and proper to employ yourself in good meditations." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 20).

Conclusion: "Draw me away and deliver me from all unstable comfort of creatures; for no created thing can quiet and satisfy my desire. Join me to Thyself by an inseparable bond of love; for Thou alone can satisfy the lover, and without Thee all things are worthless." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 23).

APRIL 8

RULES FOR CONVERSATION

Since we are social beings living in the world, we must converse with others, and it is incumbent upon us to seek ways not to escape all conversation with others, but rather to follow the golden rule whereby our conversation will be sinless.

In the first place, our words must always be true. "Accustom yourself never to tell a deliberate lie, either by way of excuse or otherwise; remembering always that God is the

God of truth. Should you have told a lie inadvertently, fail not to correct it on the spot by some explanation or reparation; an honest excuse has always more grace and force to bear one harmless than a lie."

Mental restriction in speaking, although not sinful, is dangerous and ought never to be used unless the glory and service of God requires it. In our language, "no artifice is so good and desirable than plain-dealing: wordly prudence and artifice belong to the children of the world." Holy Writ advises: "Let your speech be yea, yea; no, no; and that which is over and above these is evil." (Matt. V, 37).

Besides veracity there should also be modesty in speech. "Fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints." (Eph. V, 3).

Again, one's speech should be duly weighed and limited. "I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment." (Matt. XII, 36). "To speak little, a practice so much recommended by all wise men, does not consist in uttering few words, but in uttering none that are unprofitable; for in point of speaking, one is not to regard the quantity so much as the quality of the words; but in my opinion we should avoid both extremes. For to be too reserved, and to refuse to join in conversation, looks like disdain or a want of confidence; and, on the other hand, to be always talking, so as to afford neither leisure nor opportunity to others to speak when they wish, is a mark of shallowness and levity."

What St. Louis says regarding whispering may be added in this connection: "He that is in good company and has something to say that is merry and pleasant, should mention it so that all the company may hear him; but if it is a thing of importance, let him reserve it for a more suitable occasion."

Resolve: "I will take heed of my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue."

Conclusion: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; and a door round about my lips. Incline not my heart to evil words; to make excuses in sins. With men that work iniquity; and I will not communicate with the choicest of them." (Ps. CXL, 3 sq.).

APRIL 9

DECENCY IN ATTIRE

The following words of St. Francis de Sales so well apply to our times that they need no comment: "Exterior neatness represents in some degree the cleanliness of the interior. . . . As to the matter, form, and decency of our dress, it should be considered according to the several circumstances of the time, age, quality, company, and occasion." People are ordinarily better dressed on holidays, and this in keeping with the solemnity of the feast which is celebrated. At marriages they put on wedding garments, at funerals they use mourning. When in the company of dignitaries they dress in their best attire, which they put aside when in presence of their immediate family only. "The married woman may and ought to adorn herself when she is with her husband, and he desires it, but if she does so when she is away from him, it will be asked whose eyes she desires to favor." A greater liberty in point of ornaments is allowed to maidens because they may lawfully desire to appear agreeable to men, although with no other intention than to gain one by holy marriage. Neither is it blamable in widows who propose to marry, to adorn themselves provided they betray no levity; for having already been mistresses of families and

passed through the griefs of widowhood, they should be considered as being of a more mature and settled mind. But as for those who are widows indeed, not only in body, but in heart also, no other ornament becomes them but humility, modesty, and devotion. For if they have an inclination to gain the love of men, they are not widows indeed; and if they have no such desire why do they carry about with them the instruments of love? Old people are always ridiculous when they wish to be gay; this folly is supportable only in youth. . . . I would have devout people, whether men or women, the best dressed of the company, but the least pompous and affected, I would have them adorned with gracefulness, decency, and dignity. St. Louis says in one word, that each one should dress according to his condition; so that the wise and the good should have no reason to complain that you do too much, nor the young people that you do too little."

Resolve "neither to desire that any one's heart be set on thee, nor let thyself be taken up with the love of any one; but let Jesus be in thee, and in every good man." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 8)

Conclusion: "O Lord, draw me away and deliver me from all unstable comfort of creatures, for no created thing can fully quiet or satisfy my desire. Join me to Thyself by an inseparable bond of love; for Thou alone canst satisfy the lover, and without Thee all other things are frivolous." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 23.)

APRIL 10

HOW WE MUST SPEAK OF GOD

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,"

(Matt. XII, 34), says Holy Scripture. The man who is imbued, all absorbed, as it were, with the thought of God, will naturally speak frequently of Him and of the things appertaining to Him. "Devout conferences on spiritual things help very much to spiritual progress, especially where persons of the same mind and spirit are associated together in God." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 10). Such conversation, to be of value, ought to flow spontaneously from the heart and be entirely unaffected. "If you are in love with God, you will often speak of Him in your familiar discourses with those of your household, your friends and your neighbors."

Despite the frequency and familiarity of our intercourse with God we must always speak of Him reverently and devoutly, meekly and humbly. "It is surprising how powerfully a sweet and amiable manner of proposing good things attracts the hearts of hearers." Never speak of God or devotion in a light or thoughtless manner, but rather with the utmost attention and reverence. "I give you this advice, that you may avoid that remarkable vanity which is found in many false devotees, who upon every occasion speak words of piety and godliness by way of entertainment, without ever thinking of what they say, and afterwards falsely imagine themselves to be devout."

The objection may be raised by some devout people that, much as they desire it, their conversation seldom centers on God and His interests. They admit that they willingly talk with their friends, but the topics of conversation are for the most part worldly. "The reason why we are so willing to talk is, because by discoursing together we seek comfort from one another, and would gladly ease the heart wearied by various thoughts. And we very willingly talk and think of such things as we most love and desire, or imagine to be contrary to us. But alas! it is often in vain and to no pur-

pose; for this outward consolation is no small hindrance to interior and divine comfort." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 10).

Resolve, "If it be lawful and expedient to speak, speak those things which will edify." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 10).

Conclusion: O God! give me the grace to love Thee and to serve Thee by a virtuous life. "What doth it avail me to discourse profoundly of the Trinity, if I be wanting in humility, and consequently displeasing to the Trinity? In truth, sublime words make not a man holy and just; but a virtuous life maketh him dear to God." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 1).

APRIL 11

MODESTY IN CONVERSATION

Shakespeare in one of his dramas has some of his characters speak of hearing sights and seeing sounds. This is a figure of speech. However, there is something akin to hearing sights with regard to the imagination. Bad words may be as suggestive of immodest mind pictures as the seeing of immodest sights or the reading of immodest books, and hence may have equally evil results. Both the speaking or hearing of immodest language is forbidden and sinful. St. Francis says: "An evil word falling into a weak heart spreads itself like a drop of oil falling on linen; nay it sometimes seizes on the heart in such a manner as to fill it with a thousand unclean thoughts and temptations to lust; for as the poison of the body enters by the mouth, so the poison of the heart enters by the ear, and the tongue which utters an indecent word is a murderer."

Even the utterance or the listening to indecent words, though they may not be sinful in themselves, are calculated to lessen our sense of modesty and easily paves the way to impure and sinful language. If, as St. Francis says, the tongue that utters an impure word is a murderer, the ear that takes in vile words is a suicide, for the rank poison of immodest talk is death dealt to purity. Just as a flash of light upon a sensitized film of the camera impresses a picture and often, like the movie camera, forms a whole series of pictures, so also the deliberate listening to immodest language forms a mind picture or series of them, which, if not banished at once, will result in sin. Upon the explosion of one of the large mortars, the firing squad stop their ears for fear of physical injury to the hearing; if the ears are not stopped against immodest speech, there will result what is worse namely, moral ruin. St. Paul states this fact in the words: "Evil communications corrupt good manners." (I Cor. XV, 33).

How pure that tongue ought to be that is so often crimsoned by the Precious Blood of Christ, and how pure those ears which were spiritually opened in Baptism for what is good and holy! "If some impudent person should address you in a lascivious manner, convince him that your ears are offended, either by turning away immediately, or by such other mark of resentment as your discretion may direct."

Resolve to incline not your heart to evil words.

Conclusion: "O Lord my God, who hast created me to Thine own image and likeness, grant me this grace which Thou hast shown to be so great, and so necessary to salvation; that I may overcome my corrupt nature, which draweth me to sin and perdition." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 55).

APRIL 12

THE RESPECT WE OWE TO OTHERS

Genuine politeness is nothing more than Christian charity. The most unlettered may possess a charm of manners, a simplicity of behavior, and a respect for others which is entirely unstudied, the natural culture suggested by a virtuous life. It is not the polish of worldings, but rather the spontaneous outflowing of charity from a virtuous heart.

The very opposite of the characteristic of Christian politeness is scoffing. "To become a scoffer is one of the worst qualities of wit. God, who detests this vice, has heretofore inflicted remarkable punishments on its perpetrators. Nothing is so contrary to charity or devotion as despising and contemning our neighbor. As derision and mockery is never without scoffing, divines consider it one of the worst offences of which a man can be guilty against his neighbor by words, for other offences may be committed with some esteem of the party offended, but by this he is treated with scorn and contempt."

"There is a distinction between good-natured amusement and scoffing. "Scoffing excites laughter in the way of scorn and contempt of our neighbor; whereas innocent mirth and drollery cause laughter by an unoffending liberty, confidence, and familiar freedom," in speaking to or of our neighbor.

Charity also counsels that our merriment at the expense of others should not be too boisterous. "The subject of your joy should not only be lawful, but also decent and that your modesty may be known to all, keep yourself free from insolence, which is reprehensible. To cause one of the com-

pany to fall down, to disfigure another's face, are foolish and insolent merriments."

We must, too, overcome a super-sensitiveness concerning the respect due to us. It belongs to God to deliver us from all confusion. Oftentimes it is very profitable for keeping us in greater humility, that others know and reprehend our faults. "The humble man, having received reproach, maintains himself well enough in peace, because he is fixed in God, and not in the world." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 2).

Resolve "In everything, to attend to thyself, what thou art doing, and what thou art saying; and to direct thy whole attention to this, that thou mayest please God alone; . . . and as for the doings and sayings of others, to judge of nothing rashly." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 25).

Conclusion: "O God, who hast chosen the poor and the humble, and those who are despised by this world, for thy familiar friends and domestics," grant me the grace to be ever truly charitable toward others and sincerely humble in suffering confusion and embarrassment.

APRIL 13

RASH JUDGMENT

"Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned." (Luke VI, 37). The command is clear. But may we never judge our neighbor? No, never. Judgment belongs to God or, in the case of malefactors, to the appointed judges who act in His place. Any judgment on the part of men who hold no public office to judge, is therefore rash. "We know well," says Father Faber, "that when men judge others, whether individuals or multitudes, they generally come to an erroneous

conclusion, from the mere fact that they judge overharshly. It is the part of the evil that is in us, to put the worst construction on what we see, and to make no allowance for the hidden good. Moreover, we, unwittingly almost, judge by the worst parts of our own disposition, not by the best. We believe our evil to be common to all and our good peculiar to ourselves." (*Creator and Creature,* p. 324).

Some judge rashly because they are by nature of a bitter and harsh disposition. This disposition is usually not culpable, but to allow it play is sinful. It is especially difficult for these who have this disposition to subdue a tendency to judge rashly, and hence the greatest caution must be used lest they fall into sin.

Others are wont to judge rashly because of pride. Like the Pharisee, they are apt to believe themselves "not like the rest of men," and consequently, judging by outward appearances, condemn their fellowman, yet secretly they themselves may be more guilty than those whom they judge.

Again others play up their own virtues by condemning the opposite vices in others. Or, to assuage remorse, some judge others guilty of the same vices they themselves are guilty of, thinking that a multitude of offenders diminishes the guilt of the sin. Besides, there are those, "who take liberty to judge others rashly merely for the pleasure of delivering their opinion and conjectures on their manners and humors, by way of exercising their wit." And finally come such as judge through passion and prejudice. The righteous, however, judge only themselves.

Resolve to "judge not before the time; until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." (1 Cor. IV, 5).

Conclusion: O my soul! "Turn thy eyes upon thyself and see thou judge not the doings of others. In judging others,

a man labors in vain, often errs, and easily sins; but in judging and looking into himself, he always labors with fruit."

APRIL 14

FALSE SUSPICION

A man may not judge his neighbor; yet what if he has false suspicions of him? Is it a sin to mistrust our neighbor? No, for we are not forbidden to doubt. However, it is only allowable to doubt or suspect as far as reason and arguments may justify us, otherwise our doubts and suspicions will be rash.

False suspicion, therefore is suspecting evil in our neighbor without good or sufficient reason.

The actions of others, even such as appear sinful, are open to many interpretations. With a little thought, in most cases there will appear reasons for judging the suspected person innocent. It is the work of Christian charity always to place the most benign and mild interpretation upon the conduct of others. Thus our dear Lord excused the Jews who nailed Him to the cross, laying their act to ignorance. Hence, "a just man, when he can no longer excuse either the action or the intention, of men whom he otherwise sees to be virtuous, will not judge them, but endeavor to forget it and leave the judgment to God. Good souls do not venture in search of objects that lie concealed amidst the cloudy actions of their neighbors; but to avoid meeting them, they retire into their own hearts, to arrange the good resolutions of their own amendments. It is natural to an unprofitable soul to amuse itself with examining the lives of others. I except spiritual directors, fathers of families, magistrates, etc., because a considerable part of their duty consists in watching over the con-

duct of others; let them discharge their duty with love, and having done this, they must then attend to their own advancement in virtue."

We should always embrace the most charitable opinion concerning any action of our neighbor. Let us ever, as much as possible, judge in favor of our neighbor; and if, one action can bear a hundred faces, let us consider that which is the fairest.

There is another duty incumbent upon us in this matter, and that is never to give occasion for false suspicion ourselves. Our actions should be such as not to allow of misinterpretation. If, despite due caution, suspicions arise in the minds of others, the blame is to be laid to them, not to us.

Resolve to give a most charitable interpretation to the actions of your neighbor, and where the evidence is against him, at least to offer an excuse for his conduct; never give occasion for false suspicions yourself.

Conclusion: O God, grant me Thy peace; help me to avoid all false suspicion of my neighbors, for "He that is in perfect peace, suspects no man; but he that is discontented and disturbed, is tossed about with various suspicions: he is neither easy himself, nor does he suffer others to be easy."

APRIL 15

DETRACTION

The Catechism says that those who make known their neighbors' faults without necessity are guilty of detraction. David, speaking of detractors, says: "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent." (Ps. CXXXIX. "Now, as the serpent's tongue, according to Aristotle, is forked and has two points, so is that of the detractor, who at one stroke

stings and poisons the ear of the hearer, and the reputation of him against whom he is speaking."

A good name is an asset fully as valuable as any material possessions that a man may have. To take away the good name of another by detraction is as serious an offence as to take away any of his material possessions. Many a man who would not for a moment entertain the thought of stealing, does not scruple to rob his neighbor of his good name. This sin is very prevalent. An author, writing for priests, says: "In my opinion, detraction is the most common of all sins; and whoever reflects a little on the matter will readily agree with me." There is no curiosity so keen as that which seeks to know the lives of others. This fact again goes to prove that man is the most interesting of God's creatures for men to study. However, the author of *The Following of Christ* says to the disciple: "Son, be not curious, and give not away to useless cares. What is this or that to thee? Do thou follow Me. For what is it to thee whether this man be such or such? or that man do or say this or the other? Thou needest not to answer for others, but must give an account for thyself; why therefore dost thou meddle with them?" (Bk. III, c. 24). Nothwithstanding this and similar admonitions, man busies himself with the sayings and doings of others. Hence the earnest words of St. Francis: "I conjure you never to detract anyone, either directly or indirectly. . . . Beware of discovering the secret sins of your neighbor, or of aggravating those that are manifest; or of putting an evil interpretation upon his good works; or of denying the good which you know that he possesses, or dissembling it maliciously, or diminishing it by your words; for in all these ways you will highly offend God."

However, we must not only refrain from detraction, we ourselves must also be able to bear detraction, which more or less falls to the lot of every man. "Son, take it not to

heart if some think ill of thee, and say of thee what thou art not willing to hear. Thou oughtest to think worse of thyself, and to believe that no one is weaker than thyself. If thou walkest interiorly, thou wilt make small account of flying words." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 28).

Resolve to speak of things, rather than of persons, and be not disturbed by the judgments of men.

Conclusion: Hear Christ say through the mouth of Thomas à Kempis: "In everything attend to thyself, and what thou art doing, and what thou art saying; and direct thy whole intention to this, that thou mayest please Me alone, and neither desire nor seek anything outside of Me. And as for the sayings and doings of others, judge nothing rashly; neither busy thyself with things not committed to thy care; and thus it may come to pass that thou shalt be little or seldom disturbed." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 25).

APRIL 16

SUGGESTIONS FOR AVOIDING DETRACTION

It is a common fault to interlard praise with words of insidious detraction. "They who preface detraction with words of friendship and regard for the person detracted, or make apologies in his favor, are the most subtle detractors, and they are also the most venomous." It is evident that the words of a seeming friend carry more weight and, consequently, when derogatory, do more harm. This form of conversation is sometimes adopted to quiet qualms of conscience which must arise when detracting a person, especially one who is considered a friend.

Besides this fault, there is the tendency to generalize. It must be remembered that a man who commits a sin, no mat-

ter how serious, may not therefore be declared a habitual sinner. "Say not such a one is a drunkard, because you have seen him drunk; nor that he is an adulterer, because he has been surprised into sin; nor that he is incestuous because he has been guilty of that abominable action; for one act alone is not sufficient to constitute a vice." Furthermore, we know not but that one who has been habitually vicious, may have repented and is now on the way to sanctity. To bear out this truth we have the example of the once notorious sinner, Mary Magdalen. Simon, the leper, thought Mary Magdalen a sinner because she had been such at one time. Christ, our Lord, considered her otherwise, for he saw the repentance in her heart. "Alas, since the goodness of God is so immense that one moment suffices to obtain and receive His grace, what assurance can we have that he who was yesterday a sinner is not a saint to-day?"

We must also avoid another extreme, namely, to belittle vice in order to avoid detraction. Vice must always be condemned and detested, but this may be done quite impersonally. It may sometimes be necessary to reprimand a vice which may involve detraction of the perpetrators. "To speak commendably against the vices of another, it is necessary that we should have in view the profit either of the person spoken of, or of those to whom we speak." There must, moreover, be the motive present of undoing a scandal which may otherwise be given. It is true that, when a crime has been made public, as through the reports of a newspaper, it is no longer a subject for secrecy. To speak ill of governments and their rulers is an offence which, besides being a fault displeasing to God, may bring you into many quarrels.

Resolve "When you hear any one spoken ill of, to make the accusation doubtful, if you can do it justly; if not, excuse the intention of the party accused; if that cannot be done, express compassion for him, change the topic of con-

versation, remembering yourself and putting the company in mind that they who do not fall owe their happiness to God alone; recall the detractor to himself with meekness, and declare some good action of the party offended, if you know any."

Conclusion: O God! "Grace careth not for hearing news and curious things, because all this springs from the old corruption." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 54). Grant me the grace not to engage in broadcasting the faults and vices of others, and listening to others who do so.

APRIL 17

LYING

A lie is the deliberate and intentional denial of the truth. We are never allowed to tell a lie either in jest or for the sake of preserving ourselves or others from harm. "Accustom yourself, therefore, never to tell a deliberate lie, either by way of excuse or otherwise; remembering always that God is the God of truth." Should an untruth have been told inadvertently, the statement ought to be corrected as soon as the falsehood of the statement is realized. "Almost all authors, Catholic and Protestant, admit, that *when a just cause is present,* there is some kind or other of verbal misleading, which is not sin. . . . In all cases, however, and as contemplated by all authors, Clement of Alexandria, or Milton, or St. Alfonso, such a cause is, in fact, extreme, rare, great, or at least special." (Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua,* Note G, p. 351). Hence St. Francis says: "Though one may sometimes prudently disguise the truth by some equivocation, yet it must never be done but when the glory and service of God manifestly require it; in other cases, such artifices are dangerous."

The words of Holy Scripture, although referring to the use of oaths in connection with one's statement of the truth in a court of justice or when otherwise legitimately required, apply also here, namely: "Let your speech be yea, yea: no, no." (Matt. V, 37), Fidelity, plainness, and simplicity of speech are the great ornaments of a Christian life. "There are some common usages which are understood by all educated men, when an apparent untruth is not considered such. For instance, in polite society it is understood that if told that a certain person is not at home, the meaning intended to be conveyed by this statement is that either the person of whom it is said, is not actually in the home, or is actually there, but not willing at the time to see visitors. Again, in legal parlance, a man has the right to declare that he is not guilty of the crime of which he is accused, although he did actually commit it, for he is not considered guilty until the guilt has been proved. These are instances that every educated man knows, and hence the apparent lie is really no lie under the circumstances.

Resolve to "let your language be meek, open, sincere, without the least mixture of equivocation, artifice, or dissimulation; for although it may always be advisable to say all that is true, yet it is never allowable to speak against the truth."

Conclusion: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: and a door round about my lips." (Ps. CXL, 3).

APRIL 18

RECREATION

Recreation has its place in life and is needed for the good of the soul as well as the body. "St. John the Evangelist, as Cassian relates, amusing himself one day with a partridge on his hand, was asked by a huntsman, how such a man as he

could spend his time in so unprofitable a manner. To whom St. John replied: 'Why dost thou not carry thy bow always bent?' 'Because,' answered the huntsman, 'were it always bent, I fear it would lose its spring and become useless.' 'Be not surprised then,' said the Apostle, 'that I should sometimes remit a little of my close application and attention of mind to enjoy some little recreation, that I may afterwards employ myself more fervently in divine contemplation.' "

Recreation, therefore, has for its purpose the relaxation of the mind, which enables it afterward to devote itself to spiritual things the better.

To achieve this end, relaxation must be taken in the proper order, time, place, and measure. Hence it must not be made the object of one's life. It is out of order if it has not been preceded by work of some kind the strain of which it is calculated to relieve. It must be taken at the proper time. The time that ought to be devoted to useful occupation should not be given to recreation. There are improper places for recreation, such as in church or in places where there is grave danger of committing sin.

The measure of recreation must also be regulated with prudence. Too much recreation, so as to unfit man for his duties of life, or so protracted as in interfere with his needed sleep, is not only excessive, but may be sinful.

A question in connection with recreation may also be treated here, namely: "Is it unlawful to engage in games of skill, when small sums are staked as a recompense for the dexterity and industry of the body or of the mind?" It is not, if the recreations are good and lawful in themselves, and provided there is no excess in the time employed in them, and the amount staked be small. "To play too long is not to recreate, but to fatigue the body; and if the sum played for be too great, the affections of the players become irregular;

it is unjust to hazard so much upon skill of so little importance as that which is exercised in play."

Resolve to "take particular care not to set your affections on amusement, . . . nor to spend too much time in it, nor be to eager after it."

Conclusion: O God, who hast said through thy Apostle, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say rejoice" (Phil. IV, 4), give me the grace to rejoice with a right intention and in proper manner, so as to be pleasing to Thee and to serve Thee the better.

APRIL 19

GAMES

Games for gain that are purely games of chance, should not be indulged in. "The games of dice, cards and the like, in which the gain depends principally on hazard, are not only dangerous recreations, but are of their own nature bad and reprehensible; hence they have been forbidden by the laws, ecclesiastical as well as civil." The reason for this prohibition is because games should be a means of recreation. If they are not an exercise of bodily or mental skill, they lose their purpose.

Games of chance, as here supposed, are not the exercise of skill, but the winning is based solely on chance. Hence, any gain made through them is not earned at all, but merely fortuitous. This fact brings many evils in its trail. The games become strenuous occupations, the attention is entirely absorbed by them, there is joy only in winning, and that often at the cost of the displeasure or loss of a friend or companion. Moreover, so enticing are such games that frequently stakes are risked which are out of all proportion,

and sometimes entail an injustice to those depending upon the one thus engaged.

Care must, therefore, be exercised in all games undertaken for recreation. "Just occasions for innocent games are frequent, not however for those of hazard, on account of their being more blamable and dangerous; wherefore, in a word, play as your prudence may direct you, to comply with the civil request of the company in which you are engaged. Condescension is a species of charity which makes indifferent things good, and dangerous things allowable; it even takes away the harm from things that are in some measure evil; and, therefore, games of hazard which would otherwise be reprehensible, are not so if we use them sometimes through a just condescension."

The rule for engaging in games and such like amusements must be ever in accordance with the purpose of recreation, namely, to relieve the monotony of always doing the same thing. The end and object of our lives is to glorify God, but intense adherence to this duty in spiritual things only, to the exclusion of everything else, would be well nigh impossible. Recreation, which may be offered for the same purpose, gives an opportunity for a change, which has the advantage of affording zeal and strength to exercise our spiritual duties the better, provided only that the recreation be innocent in itself and in its circumstances.

Resolve "not to suffer thyself to be drawn away by temporal things to cleave to them, but rather draw these things to that end for which they were ordained by God, and appointed by the sovereign Artist, who left nothing in all His works but what is regular and orderly." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 38).

Conclusion: O God, "That which is of little or no profit takes up our thoughts, and that which is above all things necessary is negligently passed over; for the whole man sinks

down into outward things, and unless he quickly recovers himself, he willingly continues immersed in them. (*The Following of Christ*, Bk. III, c. 44).

APRIL 20

DANCING

"Dancing holds in social life a place that cannot be ignored. It appeals strongly to the desire to express in rhythmical motion the exuberant spirit and vitality of youth, and gratifies the craving for society and companionship. If indulged in for the sake of recreation and social fellowship, it is, in the words of St. Francis de Sales, morally indifferent, *i. e.*, neither good nor bad in itself; but as now commonly practiced, it tends to evil and entails many dangers. The best dances are not above suspicion, and therefore dancing should be indulged in but rarely and for a short time. Though the danger involved is often great, it would nevertheless, be wrong to condemn dancing absolutely." (Koch-Pruess, *A Handbook of Moral Theology*, Vol. III, pp. 42 sq.) The correct attitude toward dancing therefore would seem to be, to hold that dancing in itself may be an amusement as indifferent as any other popular amusement of the day, such as golf, swimming, etc., still, on account of the manner in which it is conducted, there is grave danger of it being evil, and in many circumstances positively sinful. "Balls, dancing and other nocturnal meetings, ordinarily attract the reigning vices and sins together, such as quarrels, envy, scoffing, and wanton love; and as these exercises open the pores of the body of those who use them, so they also open the pores of the heart, and expose them to the danger of some serpent, seizing the favorable opportunity to breathe some loose

words or lascivious suggestions into the ear, or of some basilisk, casting an impure glance of love into the heart, which being thus opened, is easily seized upon and poisoned. Hence, these idle recreations are ordinarily very dangerous; they extinguish the spirit of devotion, and leave the soul in a languishing condition; they cool the fervor of charity, and excite a thousand evil affections in the soul; and therefore they are not to be used but with the greatest caution." However, St. Francis advises: "If upon some occasion, which you cannot well avoid, you must go to a ball, see that your dancing be well conducted, *i. e.,* with modesty, gravity, and a good intention."

Resolve to dance but little and very seldom, lest you put yourself in danger of contracting an affection for it.

Conclusion: O Lord "I know not what it is, by what spirit we are led, or what we pretend to, who seem to be called spiritual persons; that we take so much pains, and have a great solicitude for transitory and worthless things, and scarce ever have our senses fully recollected to think of our inner life." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 31). Give me grace in all things to know Thy holy Will, and strength to obey it.

APRIL 21

CONSIDERATIONS IN CONNECTION WITH RECREATION

To counteract the baneful impressions which may have been imbibed in vain recreations, St. Francis advises the following: While you were engaged in amusements, time was fast passing away and death approaching nearer and nearer. "Behold how death mocks you and invites you to his dance, in which the sighs of your friends shall serve for the music,

and where you shall make but one step from this life to eternity. The dance of death is, alas! the true pastime of mortals, since by it we instantly pass from the vain amusements of this world to the pains or pleasures of the next." During the very time that you are engaged in amusements, there are many souls suffering in hell for the sins they committed or occasioned in similar dangerous pastimes. Many indeed are at that very time suffering from sickness or disease in their homes or in the hospitals, some dying during the time that you spend in these useless recreations. How well they would use their time, were they in the state of health you enjoy! Perhaps the day will come, and soon, when the tables will be turned, and while they are indulging in dangerous amusements, you will be the one lying in suffering. Much more profitably were those men and women employing their time who, instead of passing the time in worldly amusements, were praising and glorifying God in prayer and holy exercises of piety. The good God looked down upon them with pleasure, while with His blessed Mother and the angels and saints He regarded you with pity, seeing your heart filled with such vain amusements and taken up with such childish joys."

These considerations are not intended to dampen the joy of innocent recreations undertaken with a proper intention, but to warn us against the dangerous ones. Recreations that are innocent and entered upon with a good intention are a good work, and in their proper place, time, and circumstances, as good as a prayer. St. Aloysius is said to have been willing to die during the time he was taking his recreation, and St. Charles Borromeo did not disdain the diversion of a game of chess. Accordingly, we must not condemn all forms of recreation nor refuse to engage in any, but rather be on our guard against such as may be dangerous, and prudently avoid all excess in our recreations.

Resolve to engage only in innocent amusements and to use that common prudence that gives to everything its due order, time, place, and measure.

Conclusion: O Lord! "The days of this life are short and evil, full of sorrow and miseries; where man is defiled with many sins, ensnared with many passions, racked with many fears, disquieted with many cares, distracted with many curiosities, entangled with many vanities, encompassed with many errors, broken with many labors, troubled with temptations, weakened with delights, tormented with want. Oh! when will there be an end to these evils?" (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 48).

APRIL 22

FIDELITY IN SMALL THINGS

It is praiseworthy to desire to give up one's life in holy martyrdom, to yearn to do great things for the honor and glory of God, to wish zealously to bring many souls to the love of God; but as these works are possible and practical only for a minority of souls, chosen by God's special design for this purpose, it is by far more important for the majority of men to be faithful in the little things which come up daily in the ordinary course of life. I do not say that these generous desires of the soul should be stifled, but rather that we should be ready and prepared to perform them if given the opportunity; but in the meantime we must not be languishing for such opportunities, while neglecting to perform the less conspicuous duties which daily present themselves. "I mean, suffer such small injuries, trifling inconveniences, and inconsiderable losses which daily befall you; for by means of

such little circumstances as these, managed with love and affection, you will engage God's heart entirely and make it all your own. These little daily charities; this headache or toothache; this cold; this perverse humor of husband or wife; this breaking of a glass; this contempt or scorn; this loss of a pair of gloves, or a ring, or a handkerchief; those little inconveniences which we suffer by retiring early or rising early to pray or to communicate; that little bashfulness we have in performing certain acts of devotion in public; in short, all these trivial sufferings, being accepted and embraced with love, are highly pleasing to the divine Goodness, who for only a cup of cold water has promised an eternal reward to His faithful servants." Therefore, as these occasions present themselves every moment, to employ them to advantage will be a great means to heap up a store of spiritual riches.

To perform these actions well and always, for the greater honor and glory of God, is not a difficult task in itself, but because of the many occasions that present themselves, and on account of the seeming non-importance of these little acts, the task is far more difficult than it may at first appear. To be consistently faithful and to be constant in referring all things to God, is no small task. Hence our Saviour says: He that shall be faithful in small matters shall be set over great things. (Matt. XXV 21).

Resolve, whenever you eat or drink, or when you sleep or recreate yourself, to do all things well, and provided you know how to refer all your actions to God, you will profit much in the sight of the Divine Majesty.

Conclusion: O Lord! He does much who does well what he does. "Without charity the outward work profiteth nothing; but whatever is done out of charity, be it ever so little and contemptible, all becomes fruitful." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 15). Give me grace to do all for Thee.

APRIL 23

REASONABLENESS

By sweet reasonableness we here understand that equilibrium of mind which preserves a proper balance in the valuation of our own rights as well as the rights of others. Self-love is so insidious as to rob us of a true estimation of these rights, inclining us always to weigh down the scale on our side. Unless we are steadily on our guard, self-love leads us insensibly to a thousand injustices and partialities. "We condemn every trifle in our neighbors, and excuse ourselves in things of importance; we want to sell very dearly and buy very cheaply; we desire that justice should be executed in another man's house, but mercy and connivance in our own; we would have every thing we say taken in good part, but we are delicate and touchy with regard to what others say to us. . . . If there be any of our inferiors who are not agreeable, or for whom we have taken a dislike, we find fault with all that he does, and we cease not on every occasion to mortify him. On the contrary, if the conduct of any one be agreeable to us, he can do nothing that we are not willing to excuse. . . . We rigorously exact our dues, but we desire that others should be gentle in demanding theirs; we keep our own rank with precision, but would have others humble and condescending; we complain easily of our neighbor, but none must complain of us; what we do for others always seems very considerable, but what others do for us, as nothing."

As a remedy for such prejudice in our own favor, and to obtain that reasonableness which apportions to every man, as well as to ourselves, the rights due, we ought to place ourselves often in the position of our neighbor and consider how

he would act towards us or how we would like to be treated were we our neighbor. In other words, it comes to this: Always follow the golden rule, to do unto others as you would have others do unto you. "Neglect not frequently to examine whether your heart be such with respect to your neighbor as you desire his to be with respect to you if you were in his situation; for this is the touchstone of true reason." Happy the man who can preserve this balance of mind, demanding his rights meekly, and when need be, firmly, yet always mindful of the rights of others, which he never oversteps or infringes upon.

Resolve to do unto others as you would be done by.

Conclusion: O my soul! "If thou canst not make thyself such a one as thou wouldst, how canst thou expect to have another according to thy liking?" "It is evident how seldom thou weighest thy neighbor in the same balance with thyself." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 16).

APRIL 24

DESIRES

In speaking of desires here, we mean not desires for something vicious, but rather desires for that which is in itself good, or at least indifferent, but which are futile because circumstances make them impossible of execution or impractical at this time, place, or in this person. "If a young man earnestly desires to be settled in some office before the proper time, what does all this anxiety avail him? If a married woman desires to be a nun, to what purpose? If I desire to buy my neighbor's goods before he is willing to sell them, is it not a loss of time to entertain this desire? If, whilst I am sick, . . . I desire to visit others who are sick and to perform the exercises of those who are in health, are

not all these desires vain, since it is out of my power to put them into execution?" These and other useless desires crowd the soul and leave no room for the patience, resignation, meekness in suffering, and mortification which ought to engage us for the present, instead of the vain desires which are impossible of attainment under present circumstances.

Any desire which is not compatible with the state and condition of life in which we are situated at present, dissipates the heart and unfits it for its necessary occupations. Moreover, desires for spiritual things are also to be moderated, "for every desire is not of the Holy Ghost, though it seem to a man right and good. And it is difficult to judge truly whether it be a good or an evil spirit that urges you on to desire this or that, or whether you are not moved by your own spirit." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 15). Hence, in the desire for exercises of piety, prayer, mortification, humility, penance, and charity choose, with the advice of your spiritual father, such as you can execute at present. "Those which cannot be immediately executed, should be stored away in some corner of the heart, till their time comes. Thus you will never waste your time in unprofitable desires, but bring them all forth in good order. This practice of indulging useless desires is termed "building castles in the air," —an occupation which may be allowed only when the mind is legitimately free from the duty of exercising itself otherwise. Then it were better to occupy the mind with any kind of good thought than to give the devil an opening to suggest sinful thoughts.

Resolve to have many good desires, but confine them to such as are practical for your state of life, at this time and under present circumstances.

Conclusion: O Lord! Put me where Thou wilt, and do with me in all things according to Thy will. . . . Grant me

always to desire and will that which is most acceptable to Thee, and which pleaseth Thee best." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 15).

APRIL 25

THE MARRIED STATE

Although the single state, the state of virginity, is highly praised and honored in the Church, this in no wise reflects on the married state. Matrimony "is a great Sacrament, but I speak in Christ and in the Church," says St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (V, 32). Christ raised the marriage contract to a Sacrament, to sanctify that state of life to which the majority of men are called. The all-wise God in His inscrutable providence did not intend that all men should remain single. St. Paul again says: "He that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, . . . and the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit." He warns: "I would that all men were even as myself [a virgin], but everyone has his proper gift from God; one after this manner, and another after that, therefore both he that giveth his virgin in marriage, doth well; and he that giveth her not, doth better." (I Cor. c. VIII v. 7–v. 38). The state best suited for an undivided service of God is undoubtedly that of virginity; for those, however, who are not inclined to give God perfect service such as this, there is the married state, in which they can also attain sanctity, though ordinarily not of that high degree which is possible in the state of virginity. Virginity is the higher state, but the married state is excellent in itself, a holy state, sanctified by Christ by being raised to the dignity

of a Sacrament. For those whose gift, as St. Paul terms it, is not to serve God in the high degree which is the calling of the select few, the married state is not only a holy state, but for them the best state of life, and for many, the only state of life in which they can save their souls. Marriage, raised to the dignity of a Sacrament, is accordingly to be considered sacred, just as are the Sacraments of Holy Orders, Confirmation, and Baptism; and the state of life into which this Sacrament places one is holy like the state of the sonship of God inaugurated by the Sacrament of Baptism, and the state of soldiery in the army of Christ effected by the Sacrament of Confirmation. Too high an opinion of the Sacrament of Matrimony and the state of life entered upon through this Sacrament, cannot easily be held either by the married or by those who are not in the married state.

Resolve to think holily of this Sacrament. All the Sacraments are sacred.

Conclusion: O God, who hast said through Thy holy Apostle St. Paul, "Let every man abide in the same calling in which he was called" (1 Cor, VII, 20), grant me grace to live faithfully in the state of life intended for me by God, and to grow more and more pleasing to Thee, until I be allowed to enter into the state of felicity with Thee forever.

APRIL 26

MARRIED LIFE

All of us who have had our parents spared us until the days of our maturity, will have observed that the burdens, trials, and sufferings of married life are neither few nor light. To encounter these with cheerfulness, courage, and

patience, there must be a deep seated incentive to sustain the married couple, and this is none other than the love and affection, quite undemonstrative at times, which they bear to each other. God has intended that love should be the root of married life, not merely a natural love, nor a purely human love, but both these sanctified by the graces of a Sacrament. The result of this love is an indissoluble union of two hearts, so strong that nothing but death can break it. A second effect is an inviolable fidelity of the one to the other. This fidelity is visualized in the now obsolete ceremony of blessing two rings, one for the bridegroom and the other for the bride. "The Church, which by the hand of the priest blesses a ring and gives it first to the man, testifies that she puts a seal upon his heart by this Sacrament, to the end that henceforth neither the name nor the love of any other woman may enter therein, so long as she shall live who has been given to him; afterwards the bridegroom puts a ring on the hand of the bride, that she may reciprocally understand that her heart may never admit any affection for any other man, so long as he shall live upon earth whom Our Lord here gives her for a husband." The third effect is to guide and to hold them to the task of establishing a family, "which supplies the earth with faithful souls to complete the number of the elect in Heaven; for marriage is the nursery of Christianity, and is also of the highest importance to the commonwealth, for it is the origin of all its streams."

The sanctified love of husband and wife make these mutual obligations light and easy, and accounts for the cheerfulness and happiness experienced by those faithful to their duties amid very serious difficulties. "My yoke is sweet and My burden light," are words which apply here also, because the yoke is placed by God. It is God who with His invisible hand

ties the holy bond of marriage." And the burden is light, for any burden laid upon man by God and borne with love, is lightly carried, because God measures the burden according to man's strength, and, besides, lends His help to those who love Him.

Resolution: "Husbands love your wives as Christ also loved the Church." (Eph. V). "Wives love your husbands, as the Church loveth the Saviour."

Conclusion: "Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, and let us grow old together in health." (Tobias VIII, 10).

APRIL 27

HAPPINESS IN MARRIAGE

The mutual love between husband and wife produces a happiness and contentment otherwise not attainable by them. A confidence is engendered in each other, that makes the laws of God for their state something quite natural for them, which they would be led to observe, even though they were not laws. This love for her husband induces the wife to be willingly subject to her husband as the head of the family. Hence, the words of St. Paul do not seem harsh and intolerable to her: "Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord." (Eph. V, 22). The husband's authority, too, is tempered by love, so that it easily complies with the command of St. Peter: "Ye husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honor to the woman, as to the weaker vessel." (1 Pet. III, 7).

Nor will love sanctified by the Sacrament of Matrimony ever degenerate into jealousy. The mutual confidence one has in the other will preclude the suspicion of infidelity, and true

to this confidence, any semblance of impurity will be sedulously avoided by either party.

The desire for progeny also is inspired by the love between husband and wife. They realize in their children the perpetuation of themselves. Love makes their task light and teaches that happiness "consists not in storing up a quantity of worldly possessions, but in educating their children in the fear of God and in virtue." Their duties are considerately divided and shared. The man readily provides for his family, finding this task a labor of love. The wife as naturally assumes the care of the household and with loving consideration seeks the comfort of her husband and the Christian training of the children. Impelled by a supernatural love, each seeks the spiritual welfare of the other, and common prayer becomes an ordinary practice. "Such a union as this of husband and wife, in holy devotion, is the best and most fruitful of all; and to this they ought mutually to encourage and engage each other." The mutual regard for each other's spiritual welfare will prompt them, when possible, together "to confess and communicate, and to recommend to God, with a more than ordinary fervor, the happy progress of their marriage; renewing their good purposes to sanctify it still more and more by mutual love and fidelity, and recovering breath as it were, in Our Lord, in order to support with more ease the burdens of their calling."

Resolve to recognize the sacredness of married love, and the happiness and contentment it carries for those so holily united.

Conclusion: "Look down, we beseech Thee, O Lord, upon these Thy servants, and graciously protect Thy institutions, whereby Thou hast provided for the propagation of mankind; that those who are joined together by Thy authority, may be preserved by Thy help. Through Christ Our Lord." (Roman Ritual).

APRIL 28

CHASTE WIDOWHOOD

The state of chaste widowhood is commended in Holy Scripture. Widowhood, as here understood, is not merely the being bereaved of one's spouse, but rather the determination of living chastely in this state and not marrying again. St. Paul, when he says, "Honor widows that are widows indeed," (1 Tim. V, 3), has in mind such as are resolved not to marry again. "This renunciation of a second marriage must be made purely with the intention of turning all the affections of the soul to God, and of uniting the heart with that of His Divine Majesty." This condition may conduce to a high degree of spirituality. Much more time may be devoted to prayer than was possible in the married state. Hope and confidence in God are strengthened. Hope in God, whilst the husband or wife served for a support was not an unusual virtue, but to hope in God when one is destitute of this support, is worthy of great praise. When there are children who stand in need of guidance and support, principally in their spiritual concerns and their establishment in life, there are many good works to occupy a bereaved spouse and to gain for her much merit for Heaven.

The widow and the orphan are always spoken of very tenderly and considerately in the sacred writings. St. Francis has this to say of the widow: "The true widow is in the Church a little violet of March, which sends forth an incomparable sweetness by the odor of her devotion, and almost always keeps herself concealed under the broad leaves of her abjection, since, by the obscurity of her attire she testifies to her mortification. She grows in cool and cultivated

places, not willing to be importuned with the conversation of worldings, the better to preserve the coolness of her heart against all the heats which the desire of riches, of honor, or even of fond love, might bring upon her. She shall be blessed, says the Apostle, if she continues in this manner. (1 Cor. VII, 8). Despite the spiritual advantages of chaste widowhood, the admonition must be added, "that the true widow ought never to blame nor censure those who pass to a second, or even to a third or fourth marriage; for in some cases God disposes of them for his greater glory. She must always have before her eyes this doctrine of the ancients, that neither widowhood nor virginity have any other rank in Heaven but that which is assigned to them by humility."

Resolve to hold the state of widowhood in high regard, being mindful of the many spiritual advantages attached to it.

Conclusion: O God bless the widows and orphans and give them the material and spiritual gifts of which they are in need.

APRIL 29

THE SINGLE STATE

Those are said to be in the single state who will at some time marry, but for reasons, no matter what they may be, are not as yet ready to marry; others who of their own volition have chosen this state, in order the better to follow some vocation in life for which marriage would be a hindrance; and, lastly, those who have voluntarily chosen virginity in order to serve God better in some religious monastery or convent, or in the world as a priest of God. If one enters upon a vocation to which marriage would be a hindrance, let him consider well, whether he can live in chastity in this state, for without

chastity no work is pleasing to Almighty God, and it were better to give up one vocation and choose another, than to follow a vocation in which there is grave danger of committing sin. But for those who have determined and judged for themselves the possibility of remaining pure in this state, the Apostle Paul says: "He that hath determined, being steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but having power of his own will; and hath judged this in his heart, to keep his virginity, doth well." (1 Cor. VII, 37). Those who have chosen to serve God thus whole-heartedly have followed the counsel of St. Paul. But he says that such a choice of life is not of obligation though very pleasing to God for those who choose to embrace it; hence he adds: "I would have you be without solicitude. He that is without a wife, is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, and how he may please God. . . . And the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit." (1 Cor. VIII, 32, 34). However, mark well that not every man has the call to the single state. "I would that all men were even as myself," says the Apostle, "but every one hath his proper gift from God; one after this manner, and another after that. . . . Therefore, both he that giveth his virgin in marriage, doth well; and he that giveth her not, doth better." (1 Cor. VII, 7 and 38). The single are, therefore, not to underestimate the sanctity and goodness of marriage nor are the married to look askance at the single state, which, although not hallowed by a Sacrament except in the priesthood, is, nevertheless, the better state in which to serve God.

Resolve to be true to your state of life, praying God daily to give you the graces necessary to this end.

Conclusion: O God who didst call one to this and another to that state of life, give us all the grace to work for Thy greater honor and glory, to help one another on the way of

salvation, that thus the plans of Thy Divine Providence may be fulfilled in all.

APRIL 30

PERSEVERANCE IN THE DEVOUT LIFE

There are many temptations to allure one from following a devout life. One of the most insidious perhaps is the advice of so-called friends. The proverb is but too true that often our friends are our worst enemies. Men and women of the world rarely understand either the value or the importance of a life devoted to God, our neighbor, and our own soul; or, understanding it, the stings of an accusing conscience for not engaging in a similar life, tend to make them believe, such a life in others an exaggeration, harmful to the individual practicing it, an empty show, and the result of pure hypocrisy. "Your friends will make a thousand remonstrances, which they believe to be wise and charitable. They will tell you that you will fall into some melancholy humor; that you will lose your credit in the world and make yourself insupportable; that you will grow old before your time; that your domestic affairs will suffer; that you must live in the world like one in the world; that salvation may be had without so many mysteries; and a thousand similar impertinences." They will say that to rise early in the morning to attend to spiritual exercises is detrimental to health, never considering for a minute how much more detrimental to health is the late hour for retiring observed by those who engage in the frivolous pastime of evening balls and entertainments. Little acts of mortification are looked upon as deleterious to good health, whereas the deprivation suffered because of business and work, the suffering endured because

of adherence to the foolish rules of fashion are passed over with little or no comment. Few tell us that we are working too hard and making too many sacrifices, if the efforts are directed to attain financial or social success. These worldly ambitions are considered honorable and any labor or sacrifice they entail is not deemed too great for the attainment of these ends. When, however, an effort to attain personal sanctity is in question, the means to this end are viewed with suspicion and the verdict is thoughtlessly given that they are too difficult. Hence those, who despite the opinion of the world, seek earnestly for the kingdom of God are condemned by the votaries of the world, and if possible are sought to desist from such efforts, and if this fail, the hatred of the world follows them as a consequence. "If you had been of the world, the world would love [you as] its own; but because you are not of the world, . . . therefore the world hateth you." (John XV, 19).

Resolve to persevere in your good resolution to follow a devout life, despite the counsels of the world.

Conclusion: Hear Our dear Lord say to you: "If the world hate you, know ye, that it hath hated Me before you. . . . I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John XV, 18–20).

MAY 1

THE WORLD AND DEVOTION

The principles of the world and the maxims of genuine devotion, like oil and water, will not mix. He who would truly lead a devout life, must renounce the principles of the world. The life of the worlding and that of the devout man are diametrically opposed. Because those who love the world seek, even at the cost of sin, to enjoy this present life to the

utmost, the remorse and trouble of conscience that must ensue are a continual incentive for finding fault with such as do not do likewise. Hence, already in the time of Christ, the world found fault with St. John for "neither eating nor drinking," and with Jesus because "the Son of Man is come eating and drinking." The manner of life of St. John displeased them and of Christ they said: "behold a man that is a glutton and a drinker of wine." (Luke VII, 33).

Whatever he does the world will find something to criticize in the devout man. Should he, in condescension to others, indulge moderately in some worldly amusement, the world is scandalized; should he, on the contrary, shun all such amusements, he is put down as a fanatic. If he dresses well, the world accuses him of pride and affectation; if he is indifferent to dress, he is considered eccentric and lacking in good manners. If he is long in confessing, he is adjudged a great sinner; if short in the same action, it is said that he is frivolous about so great a Sacrament, and all his genuine virtue is deemed hypocrisy. If his actions are beyond criticism, then his intentions are impugned. Try as he will, the devout man will never be able to please the world; it is so whimsical, it is impossible to satisfy it.

It is necessary, therefore, to break with the world and to go our own way, regardless of what is thought, said or done by the world. This very course of action, contrary to the accepted way of the world, will be a test as to whether our devotion is genuine and deep-rooted. It is difficult not to be like others, and yet in all humility to seem to be no different from them. In time, when the world realizes that we have broken with it, it will no longer concern itself with us, except perhaps by way of persecution. And that, in the beginning of our conversion, it strove to hinder us from our course is to our advantage, for, "it contributes highly to our security of devotion at the beginning to suffer reproaches and

calumny on its account, since we thus avoid the dangers of pride and vanity."

Resolve to "turn a deaf ear to this blind world; let it cry as long as it pleases, like an owl to disturb the birds of the day; let us be constant in our designs, and invariable in our resolutions."

Conclusion: O God! "Grant that I may die to all things in the world, and for Thy sake love to be despised and unknown in this world. Grant that I may rest in Thee above all things desired, and that my heart may be at peace with Thee." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 15).

MAY 2

DELUSIONS

The generous soul that has abandoned the world and its pleasures for a life of devotion, rarely escapes the temptations which makes the aim of a devout life seem too high for her attainment, and that the strangeness of this new kind of life unendurable. The amusements and pastimes in which a person formerly engaged now appear doubly alluring. These impressions are delusions. They are due to the newness of it all. "Before we become familiar with the inhabitants of any country, no matter how gracious and courteous they may be, we find ourselves at a loss amongst them." Similarly in this new world of piety and devotion, we feel unfamiliar with its practices, and with those engaged in them. There may arise a feeling of shyness, which at times may become so painful as to tempt a discontinuance of the good work begun.

If such thoughts assail the mind, remember the eternal

glory that will recompense you for the worldly glory forfeited. Consider whether the pleasures of worldly amusements can ever compare with the celestial joys promised to those who serve God faithfully. "Believe me, if you persevere, you will quickly receive consolations, so delicious and agreeable that they will force you to acknowledge that the world has nothing but gall in comparison with this honey, and that one day of devotion is preferable to a thousand years expended in all the world can afford."

As to the high aims of the spiritual life and our inability to attain them, we must answer to this delusion in the words of St. Paul: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." (Phil. IV, 13). Now that with the grace of God we have made the start we ought not to look back but go forward with courage and confidence in Him. There is danger, too, that a person who has passed from a sinful life to a life of devotion, if he again reverts to his worldly follies, incurs the danger intimated in Holy Writ, which tells us that "when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest; and not finding, he saith: I will return into my house whence I came out. And when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in they dwell there. And the last state of that man becometh worse than the first." (Luke XI, 24–26).

Resolve that, should these delusions seek lodgment in your mind, you will have patience, for they will soon disappear.

Conclusion: O God! "Give me wings like a dove, that I may not only be enabled to fly upward during the time of this present life, but also rest on the mountain of eternity in the life to come."

MAY 3

TEMPTATIONS

Temptation is an allurement to sin proceeding from our corrupted nature or from the influence of the devil. Temptation in itself is no sin, but delectation in it, and consent to it, constitute sin. "Satan, the world and the flesh, seeing a soul espoused to the Son of God, send her temptations and suggestions, by which (1) Sin is proposed to her; (2) She is either pleased or displeased with the proposal; (3) In fine she either consents or refuses. Such are the three steps to iniquity: temptation, delectation, and consent. But though these three actions are not so manifest in all kinds of sins, yet they are palpably seen in those that are enormous."

Owing to original sin, there is in the heart of man a tendency to inordinate ambition, inordinate pleasure, and inordinate love of possessions. These, of themselves, or through the machinations of the devil, allure the heart from God and direct it to the attainment of their seeming goods. These tendencies, in a greater or less degree, one or all in each individual, are the sources of sin. Their presence in the heart is not sin, but pleasure in them and consent to their allurement is sin. The stimulus to sin experienced in the drawing of the heart to the attainment of these desires beyond the will of almighty God and not within His law, is known as concupiscence. St. James speaks of this when he says: "Let no man when he is tempted, say that he is tempted by God, for God is not a tempter of evils, and He tempteth no man. But every man is tempted by his own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured. Then when concupiscence has con-

ceived, it bringeth forth sin. But sin when it is completed begetteth death." Concupiscence has conceived when pleasure and consent is given to the temptation, and the death here meant is the loss of the life of grace, which spells spiritual death.

The conclusion to be drawn then, is that the tendencies, enticements, or allurements to sin are not yet sin; it is not until the pleasure and consent given by free will complete them, that they become sinful. Temptations that are deliberately sought and entered into are not treated here; such action gives temptation a different aspect. It were well to note this difference between temptation and sin carefully, for some mistake temptation for sin and others consider sin only a temptation.

Resolve courageously to fight sin striving for the ascendency in your heart. "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation."

Conclusion: "O Lord, my God, who hast created me to thine own image and likeness, grant me this grace, which Thou hast declared to be so great and so necessary to salvation, that I may overcome my corrupt nature, which draws me to sin and perdition. (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 55).

MAY 4

RESISTANCE TO TEMPTATION

One of the consoling facts in connection with temptation is that no temptation, how vehement soever, or how frequently it may return, can force you to commit sin. As long as temptation displeases you, and you give no consent, there is no sin. "You must then be courageous amidst temptations,

and never think yourself overcome as long as they displease you, observing well this difference between feeling and consenting; *viz.*: we may feel temptations though they displease us, but we never consent to them unless they please us, since to be pleased with them serves as a step towards our consent." May temptation be ever so violent and frequent, its presence is not sin, provided we ourselves are not deliberately the cause of it, and it is utterly impossible that temptation can make us offend God, if we remain steadfast in our resolution to take no pleasure in it. The Apostle tells us: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. X, 13). St. Francis de Sales explains: "As there are two parts in the soul, the inferior and the superior, and as the inferior does not always follow the superior, but acts for itself apart, it frequently happens that the inferior part takes delight in the temptation without the consent, nay, against the will, of the superior." That is that warfare which the Apostle describes (Gal. V, 17) when he says, "The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary one to another." Yet, notwithstanding all the disorder we feel in our soul and body, if we persevere in our resolution not to consent to the temptation, nor to the delectation which may arise, there can be no sin. These are consoling facts calculated to give courage to those who are violently and frequently tempted. They may rest assured that they do not sin if they but firmly resolve not to, and remain faithful to this resolution. Frequent temptation is dangerous because of its constant repetition, which has a tendency to wear away that patience necessary to maintain perseverance, however, "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." (Phil. IV, 13).

Resolution: "Be sober and watch, because your adversary

the devil goeth about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Pet. V, 8).

Conclusion: "O God! Protect and defend the soul of Thy poor servant amidst so many dangers of this corrupt life, and direct him, in the company of Thy grace, through the way of peace, to the country of everlasting light." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 59`

MAY 5

VIOLENT TEMPTATIONS

God often allows those whom He wishes to advance to the higher degrees of His divine love to be assaulted by violent temptations. Sad to say, however, many who have manfully withstood the assaults of such temptations, do not attain to the perfection He desires for them. By not corresponding faithfully with the graces proffered, despite their victories against greater temptations, they often succumb to the smaller ones.

To be tempted by violent temptations is often a sign that God wills to make you great in His sight, "nevertheless, you must always be humble and fearful, not assuring yourself that you shall be able to overcome small temptations, after you have prevailed against great ones, by any other means than a constant fidelity to His Divine Majesty."

The example of Job in the Old Testament illustrates how God at times allows those whom He loves to be violently tempted. There is scarcely another record of such harrowing temptations as were those suffered by the patient Job. Deprived of all his possessions, bereft of his children, afflicted with a loathsome disease, despised by his wife and friends, he still continued faithful and confident in his trust in God,

and never once uttered a word of impatience. As a result he emerged from the trial purified and confirmed in the love of God and obtained a temporal reward as well as the more important reward of eternal life.

The violence of temptation at times is so great as to be quite confusing to the soul, so that it is difficult for the one thus tried, to know whether he has sinned or not. It would seem that he has been abandoned by God. But so long as the will refuses to give consent, not only to the temptation, but also to the delectation in it, there need not be any fear, for God is not offended. Despite the feeling of total abandonment by God, He is there in the heart, giving grace and strength to resist the suggestions of the world, the flesh, and the devil and in His own time He will again disclose His presence in the soul and fill it with the satisfaction of having fought the good fight, and often overwhelm it with His sweet consolation.

Resolve in time of temptation to continue all the more faithfully in prayer and the reception of the Sacraments, firmly confiding in God.

Conclusion: Listen to the words of Christ: "Lift up your face to heaven. Behold, I and all my saints with Me, who in this world have had a great conflict, do now rejoice and are comforted, are now secure, are now at rest, and they shall for all eternity abide with Me in the kingdom of My Father."

MAY 6

MEANS OF RESISTING TEMPTATION

The first means of resisting temptation is prayer. Temptation is always formidable, and of our own strength alone we would not be able to resist it successfully. The grace of God

must come to our assistance. Any one attacked by a power stronger than himself, seeks aid, and if no other way is possible, cries out for help. Just so with temptation. When temptation comes, aid must be sought through prayer; we must cry out to God and to His Blessed Mother for help. "Jesus and Mary help me!" and similar ejaculations ought to be on our lips, or at least in our hearts, as soon as temptation comes upon us.

"If you find that temptation nevertheless still continues, or even increases, run in spirit to embrace the holy Cross, as if you saw our Saviour Jesus Christ crucified before you." Another means is to turn one's thoughts to good and pious reflections, "for, when good thoughts occupy your heart, they will drive away every temptation and suggestion." A third means, not so often used, is to disclose our temptations to our confessor. Many a time a humble and sincere disclosure of the temptations which assault us is the most effective means of dispelling them. An evil companion who tries to allure another to sin is always anxious for secrecy, and often the demand is made that nothing should be said about the contemplated sin. If the evil suggestion is disclosed, there is little danger of the sin being committed. So too temptations, it matters not from what source they come, if humbly imparted to one's confessor, will seldom be consented to, and the very telling of them dissipates them. This pious practice, were it more prevalent, would prevent many sins.

If, after all these means have been made use of, the temptations still persist, there is nothing else to do but courageously, patiently and perseveringly to continue to resist, relying for victory on the goodness of God, who will not allow temptation to be stronger than we are able to endure. Never hesitate, never stop to argue, but with confidence in God be resolute, never wavering for a moment, buoyed up with the thought that the more violent and lasting tempta-

tions are, the nearer God is to us to help and reward us. Every effort of resistance will bring an eternal reward. After the storm will come the calm. The greater and the more prolonged the temptation, the greater and the sweeter will be the peace and consolation that will follow.

Resolve to "pray that ye enter not into temptation." (Matt. XXVI, 41).

Conclusion: It is appointed for me once to die, and I know not when, or where, or how; but what I do know is, that if I die in mortal sin, I am lost forever.

MAY 7

SMALL TEMPTATIONS

There are those who seldom, if ever, suffer more serious temptations, yet are continually tried by smaller ones. These temptations, though easily overcome, are a severe test of patience. To have overcome a grievous temptation brings with it a feeling of satisfaction, to which God very often adds the sweet consolation of His approval. To be continually on our guard against small temptations, however, is a tedious task, and there is no great glory in having resisted them for the very reason that they are so small.

Nevertheless it is very important to resist these small temptations, lest consent to them pave the way for succumbing to the greater ones when they may appear. The duty of the sentinel is monotonous and not calculated to bring much glory, still we know that the safety of an entire army may depend upon the fidelity of the guard. Should he leave only one of the enemy through his line, the information thus gained may spell the destruction of the entire army. Similarly, the admission of one small temptation may ulti-

mately cause the ruin of the entire life of grace in the soul.

Moreover, there is also the matter of loyalty. A true friend is faithful to us not only in the great needs which but seldom make a demand on him, but he is always staunch and true to us no matter how small the test of his friendship may be. Similarly if we are loyal to God, we will want to prove this loyalty, no matter how insignificant the proof of our fidelity may be. This constancy in our love of God is as pleasing to Him as resisting some great temptation which He may allow to come upon us only at rare intervals. "Although we must oppose great temptations with invincible courage, and the victory we gain over them is extremely advantageous, it may happen that we may profit more in resisting small ones, for as great temptations exceed, in quality, so small ones exceed in quantity; therefore, the victory over them may be comparable to that which is gained over the greatest. . . . Therefore, I say, that being ever ready to fight courageously against great temptations, we must in the meantime diligently defend ourselves against those that seem small and inconsiderable."

Resolve to "run by patience to the fight proposed to us." (Heb. XII, 1).

Conclusion: "Only life of my soul! I shall ever, for Thy glory, live contented amid a thousand torments." (*Spiritual Combat,* p. 97).

MAY 8

DIFFICULTY OF RESISTING TEMPTATION

It is a comparatively easy matter to resist great temptations for those who are leading a good Christian life. Consistently to resist the smaller temptations is a much more

difficult matter. The man or woman who is earnestly striving to lead a good life, will not find it over difficult not to blaspheme God, but to avoid distractions in prayer, ever to use the Holy Name with reverence, is much more difficult. "It is easy to refrain from murder, but it is extremely difficult to restrain all the little sallies of passion, the occasion of which present themselves every moment. It is very easy for a man or woman to refrain from adultery, but it is not so easy to refrain from glances of the eyes, from giving or receiving marks of love, or from uttering or listening to flattery." The great majority of Christians find it easy not to steal; is it as easy to be content with what we have and not to covet the goods of others? A man may stop, if there is question of slandering another and thereby defaming his neighbor; will he as easily tell the truth on all occasions? Self-respect will inhibit drunkenness in most cases, but the little excesses in eating and drinking will not be curbed by the same motive. These small temptations of anger, suspicion, jealousy, envy, fond love, levity, insincerity, affectation, craftiness, and impure thoughts are continually assaulting even those who are the most devout and resolute. It requires watchfulness and indomitable constancy always to resist. "Constant dripping wears away a stone," and continual temptations will finally break down our defence, cause a fall, sometimes even bad habits, and open the way to mortal sins, unless we have a great distrust of our own strength in spiritual matters and a correspondingly great trust in God, who is our ally.

Here then, there is a cogent reason for frequent prayer and for a special appeal in every "Our Father" that we say, to "lead us not into temptation." Each morning, too, our good resolution must be repeated and strengthened if success in resisting these smaller temptations is desired. The temptations which come to man each day are so many as to cause

discouragement, were it not for the thought that the graces of God daily given are even more numerous. "We must, therefore, diligently prepare ourselves for this warfare and rest assured that for as many victories as we shall gain over these smaller enemies, so many gems shall be added to the crown of glory which God is preparing for us in Heaven."

Resolve, "when thou feelest thyself wounded from having weakly, or it may even be wilfully and deliberately, fallen into some sin, to turn instantly to God, saying: 'Behold O Lord, what of myself I have done' and what indeed, could be expected of me but falls?" (*Spiritual Combat,* p. 72).

Conclusion: "Forgive me, Lord, for Thy own sake; suffer me not to depart from Thee, nor evermore to offend Thee. (*Spiritual Combat,* p. 72).

MAY 9

MEANS OF RESISTING TEMPTATION

As we are here speaking of small temptations, which are numerous rather than very dangerous, the first means of resistance is to despise them, to give them little attention. Like insects, "they continually hover about us, and sometimes sting us on the legs, the hands, or the face; as it is impossible to be altogether free from them, the best defence that we can make is not to give ourselves too much trouble about them; for although they may tease us, yet they can never hurt us, so long as we are firmly resolved to dedicate ourselves in earnest to the service of God." Should any one of them seem to make an impression on us and try to settle in the heart, then it would be well to perform an act of the contrary virtue, and, without being perturbed,

go on with our work, play, reading, prayers, or whatever we are doing. Never hesitate, never stop to argue, but quietly perform one or the other act of virtue contrary to the temptation. If the temptation still persists, then, without being disturbed, go in spirit to the crucifix and make an act of love, kissing Christ's sacred feet. The devil will cease to annoy us if he finds that temptation only drives us to acts of love of God. "This is the best means of overcoming the enemy, in small as in great temptations; for as the love of God contains within itself the perfection of all the virtues, and is even more excellent than the virtues themselves, so it is also the sovereign antidote against every kind of vice; and, by accustoming your mind on these occasions to have recourse to this remedy, you need not even examine by what kind of temptation it is troubled."

All this must be done with the greatest meekness and humility of heart. Meekness, in never tiring nor becoming impatient in this continual warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil; humility, in knowing that, owing to our corrupted nature, we are open to all temptations, and would be easily overcome, were it not for the intense love of God, who does not allow temptation to be stronger than the strength we have through His grace. Therefore, never arrogantly rely on your own strength, but humbly trust in the help of God's grace, despise these small temptations, oppose them without perturbation by gently performing some act of virtue opposed to them, and as an antidote to them often whisper little acts of love of God. Thus, rather than doing us harm, they will be a means of our advancement in virtue.

Resolve to "wage unceasing war against earthly pleasures and comforts, so no vice will have much power to assail thee. For all vices spring from this one root of pleasure; when this, therefore is cut away by hatred of self, they lose their strength and power." (*Spiritual Combat,* p. 93).

Conclusion: "Grant me Thy Grace, most merciful Jesus, that it may be with me, and continue with me to the end." *The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 15).

MAY 10

ARMING THE SOUL AGAINST TEMPTATION

"In time of peace prepare for war," says the proverb. Likewise, in time of quiet prepare against temptation. First it is necessary to learn what our predominant passion is, and the consequent faults or sins that we are continually committing. When these are known, St. Francis advises us to think, speak, and act contrary to them. If we be given to pride and vanity, we must adopt a mode of thought which will bring before the mind's eye the folly of these vices; how in our origin we are nothing, that without God's continual sustenance we would fall back into nothing.

Who in the face of these facts will think too much of himself, consider himself better than others and despise them? We must speak against this vice also, even though we be not yet fully freed from it; "for by declaiming against a thing, we bring ourselves to hate it, though at first we might have had an affection for it. "Every time opportunity offers, we should practice the opposite virtue, no matter how contrary to our inclination it may be. If the opportunity does not present itself, then we should seek it, so that, when temptation again assaults us, we shall be well practiced in the contrary virtue, which makes the conquering of the temptation comparatively easy. If inclined to avarice, the thought expressed in the Bible: "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and to suffer the loss of his soul," ought to give the right tenor to our thoughts. To speak loudly against covetousness, and in praise of the utter contempt of

the world, should have the effect of making these feelings genuine in our soul. To give frequent alms according to our means will, before long, eradicate covetousness from our heart. Similarly with impatience, to remember the words of our dear Saviour: "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart," will stimulate thoughts of imitation of Christ's beloved virtue. To speak of the folly of this vice and the beauty of its opposite will gradually wear away an inclination to impatience. And a persevering effort to refrain from the angry word and hasty action will gain after a time the constant practice of this beautiful virtue of meekness of heart. The same is true of impurity and all the other vices to which a man is prone. To think, to speak, and to act against the vice to which we are most inclined, is to forearm ourselves against temptation when it comes, and will place the advantage for victory on our side.

Resolve to prepare against temptation in thought, word and action.

Conclusion: "O Lord, my God, who hast created me to Thine own image and likeness, grant me this grace, which Thou hast declared to be so great and so necessary to salvation, that I might overcome my corrupt nature, which draweth me to sin and perdition." (*The Following of Christ*, Bk. III, c. 55).

MAY 11

INQUIETUDE

St. Francis de Sales defines inquietude as "nothing else but that grief of mind which we conceive for some evil which we experience against our will, whether it be exterior, as poverty, sickness, contempt; or interior, as ignorance, avidity, repugnance."

It is natural for man to desire to escape present or threatening evils. In as far as the evil is combated without undue haste, without confusion of mind, and reasonably, there is no conflict with the proper order of things; but it is contrary to good order, when in seeking to escape an the evil equilibrium of mind is lost, the effort is disproportionate to the evil to be dispelled or warded off, courage and resignation are overthrown in what cannot be overcome, sadness fills the heart and robs the mind of its peace, and the soul is confused in its effort to practice virtue and to avoid sin. In this state of mind a great danger lurks. Just as a man in a weakened physical condition is a likely prey of sickness, so the soul in this confused and consequently weakened state is open to many temptations, with but little force and energy to resist. "Whenever, then, you are pressed with a desire to be freed from some evil, or to obtain some good, be careful both to settle your mind in repose and tranquillity, and to compose your judgment and will; and then gently procure the accomplishment of your desire, taking in regular order the means that may be most convenient. When I say gently, I do not mean negligently, but without hurry, trouble and inquietude; otherwise, instead of obtaining the effect you desire, you will mar all, and embarrass yourself the more."

Especial care must be taken lest trivial cares cause inquietude; these may so confuse the mind as to make it unprepared for the greater difficulties which will from time to time come upon it. We must ever have a firm and loving confidence in the goodness of God's providence, never act in haste and while inquietude is upon us, but whenever possible, postpone action until such time when we have regained our composure.

If the action allows of no delay our activity should be moderated as much as possible and performed not according to our desire but according to reason. "If you can disclose the

cause of your disquietude to your spiritual director, or at least to some faithful and devout friend, be assured that you presently will find ease."

Resolve, "if thou hast any uneasiness in thy heart, to tell it immediately to thy confessor, or to some good person, and then thou shalt be enabled to bear thy evil very easily by the comfort he will give thee." (St. Louis).

Conclusion: In all things that disquiet thee say: "Behold, Lord, Thy servant; let Thy will be done in me. I know and confess that the truth of Thy word shall stand forever. Thy promises are infallible, and in them do I trust. Behold Thy creature; do with me what Thou wilt. My God, I have nothing to hinder me; I am thine alone." (*Spiritual Combat,* p. 223).

MAY 12

SADNESS

There are only two plausible reasons for sadness, namely: compassion and repentance. There are many reasons, however, for banishing this feeling from the soul. All who have been deeply saddened have experienced that they have been stupefied and oppressed, robbed of resolution and good judgment, deprived of courage and weakened in moral strength. For these very reasons, except in the two cases mentioned above, sadness must be dispelled as much as possible.

Some are melancholy by nature, others are tempted with feelings of sadness by the devil. In both cases a strong effort must be made to overcome this disposition, for "sadness kills many, and there is no profit in it." (Ecclus. XXX, 25). "The enemy makes use of sadness and temptation against the just; for as he endeavors to make the wicked rejoice in their sins, so he strives to make the good grieve in their good works;

and as he cannot procure the commission of evils, but by making it appear agreeable, so he cannot avert us from good except by making it appear disagreeable."

If tempted to sadness, the first means to dispel this disposition of the soul is prayer. "Is any of you sad? Let him pray." (James V, 13). With lively sentiments of confidence in God, such ejaculations as: "O God of mercy! O infinite Goodness! O my sweet Saviour! O God of my heart! My joy, my hope! help me." Or "O Jesus, be thou a Jesus to me! When wilt thou comfort me?" are powerful means to dispel undue sadness.

Again, we must not cease to perform our usual works of piety, no matter how distasteful they may have become. "Persevere, and the enemy will flee, for if the temptation has only as its effect to make us more constant in our good works, our adversary will cease to urge it, seeing that his designs are defeated and that just the opposite result ensues because of it."

Another effective means of overcoming sadness is to sing spiritual hymns, if not aloud, at least in our hearts; for the singing of joyful songs has a tendency to raise one's spirits.

External actions of fervor are also recommended, such as kissing the crucifix, pressing it to one's bosom, raising the eyes and hands to heaven.

But the surest and best means of all is frequent Holy Communion. "Holy Communion is the best means, because this heavenly Bread strengthens the heart and rejoices the spirit.

To disclose the sadness to our confessor is also very helpful and very often in this, too, the very disclosure is the remedy of banishing the temptation.

Resolve to banish sorrow and to rejoice in the Lord.

Conclusion: "O Lord! I long for the joy of peace; I beg for the peace of Thy children, who are fed by Thee in the light of Thy consolation. If thou givest peace, if Thou in-

fusest holy joy, the soul of Thy servant shall be full of melody and devout in Thy praise." (*The Following of Christ*, Bk. III, c. 50).

MAY 13

EQUANIMITY

Divine Providence has put much variety into this world. Daylight alternates with darkness. There is a gradual but constant mutation of the seasons. Fair weather is interrupted by storms. The dainty tints of the flowers are set off by the more somber colors of luxurious foliage. The plains are relieved by the rolling country and the mountains. The silence of winter is followed by the hum and buzz of insects during the spring and summer. The crisp cold temperature of January is in time changed for the warm, balmy atmosphere of a June day. Everywhere and in everything there is a well ordered variety intended and executed through the plan of almighty God.

Similarly, in the life of the soul, too, there is great variety. "Man, who, according to the ancients, is an epitome of the universe, or another little world, for he never remains long in the same state; his life flows away upon the earth like the waters, floating and undulating in a perpetual diversity of motion, which sometimes lifts him up with hope, and sometimes brings him down with fear; sometimes carries him to the right hand by consolation, sometimes to the left by affliction; and not one of his days, no, not even one of his hours, is in every respect like another."

And yet in all this variety there is a most wonderful unity and harmony. All is guided by God's Providence, all conforms with the single and original plan of the almighty Creator. In man's little world, although he is unable to control

the changes which may affect him, he should be able to gather up the loose ends, as it were, and bring about a unity and harmony in his soul, which is possible by equanimity. "It is necessary that we should endeavor to preserve an inviolable equality of heart amidst so great an inequality of occurrences, so that, although all things turn and change around us, we should remain constantly immovable; ever looking and aspiring toward God." This is done by the resolution "never to forsake God, nor to abandon His divine love, which serves as a counterpoise to our souls, to keep them in a holy equilibrium, amidst the inequality of the several motions attached to the condition of this life. . . . Our souls having by resolution embraced the precious love of God, continue constant in the midst of the inconstancy and vicissitude of consolations and afflictions, whether spiritual or temporal, exterior or interior."

Resolve never to turn from God by committing sin.

Conclusion: O heavenly Father, give me an intense love of Thy Son, Jesus Christ. Then nothing will ever separate me from this love; "neither tribulation nor anguish, nor death nor life, nor present grief, nor the fear of future accidents, nor the artifices of evil spirits, nor the height of consolation, nor the depths of afflictions, nor tenderness, nor dryness."

MAY 14

SENSIBLE CONSOLATION

"Devotion does not always consist in that sweetness, delight, consolation, or sensible tenderness of heart which moves us to tears and causes us to find satisfaction in some spiritual exercises." Such joy in the service of God and complacency in the practice of virtue may accompany true devo-

tion, but they are not a necessary concomitant thereof. Many may experience such feelings who are not even genuinely devout, whereas others who are truly pious may not feel them at all. The reason is, religious feeling may be aroused also by other means than devotion. Disposition, sentiment, mood, surroundings and circumstances all play their part in exciting feeling. A man quite devoid of religion may experience genuine tenderness of heart and great satisfaction in the practice of merely natural virtues. A glow of emotion and an exultation of spirit is the content of much of the religion practiced today. It follows, then, that religious feeling is not an infallible sign of true devotion and genuine virtue. The test is rather, whether a man is truly faithful to his God and constant in the practice of virtue despite a lack of all such feeling. This proves whether he is religious for God's sake or for the sake of experiencing heightened emotions and feelings of complacency.

God often allows religious feeling to accompany devotion, especially to beginners, thus encouraging and helping them on their way; but as they advance in virtue, he gradually withdraws this sweet and sensible complacency to give the individual the benefit of serving Him with a pure intention, of serving God for God's sake, and not for his own advantage.

We may know, then, if we are devout for God's sake or for the sake of these religious feelings, if we serve and praise God just the same whether we be in possession of these feelings or not. He who is ready to despair, who is discouraged and readily gives up his religious practices because of the absence of religious feeling, may be sure that he has still much to learn about true devotion. The experience of many of the saints, as we know from their lives, has been an almost total absence of feeling in their devotion. God in His goodness usually does not deprive us of this sensible devotion al-

together, but only for a time, thereby testing our fidelity and giving us the opportunity of gaining more merit. Are we faithful during such periods when sensible devotion is withheld from us?

Resolve to reduce to practice with a constant, resolute, prompt and active will whatever you know to be pleasing to God.

Conclusion: "As long as I live, I am subject to change, even against my will; so as to be sometimes joyful, at other times sad; now easy, then troubled; now devout, now dry; sometimes fervent, sometimes sluggish; one day grave, another gay." O God! in all these vicissitudes, let my whole soul be bent upon pleasing Thee alone. (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 33).

MAY 15

TRUE CONSOLATION

There is a true consolation of soul that excites the affections, "strengthens the spirit, and adds to the promptitude of virtue; a holy cheerfulness, which makes our actions lovely and agreeable even in the exterior." These tender and delightful affections are sometimes good and profitable. They are like the gentle rain that refreshes and aids the soil. They are little foretastes of Heaven that allure to virtue and perseverance. However, they are not the ordinary lot of the soul. In most souls the ordinary condition of the affections is a feeling that we love God and are loved by Him; sensible consolation and sweetness come only at rare intervals. This arrangement is beneficial for us, as are all God's designs, for if we are faithful, no matter what sentiments are in the soul, we prove that we act out of love for Him and not for the

sake of the consolations he at times may allow to accompany our actions for Him.

Although we should be grateful for the sweet consolations God sometimes sends us, yet we should not be too eager for them, nor think ourselves worthy of them. Since religious feelings may be good or bad for the soul according to the source from which they come and the use we make of them, we must know how to distinguish the good from the bad. "If this sweetness, tenderness, and consolation make us more humble, patient, tractable, charitable, and compassionate towards our neighbor; more fervent in mortifying our concupiscences and evil inclinations; more pliable and submissive to those whom we ought to obey; more sincere and upright in our lives:—then, doubtless, they proceed from God. But if these consolations have no sweetness but for ourselves; if they make us curious, harsh, quarrelsome, impatient, obstinate, haughty, presumptuous, and rigorous towards our neighbor, when we already imagine ourselves to be saints, and disdain to be any longer subject to direction or corrections, then they are, beyond all doubt, false and pernicious." According to their fruits you shall know them. If they aid in making us better, more prompt to virtue, and more zealous, then we may humbly and gratefully work under their influence. If, on the other hand, their absence makes us peevish, irritable, and despondent, this is an unmistakable hint that they are not from God, or if from God, that we are not receiving them properly, and are more attached to these delights than to God Himself. In which latter case, it were well to renew our purpose to live for God alone and again begin the practice of virtue to please Him alone.

Resolve to seek consolations only for God's sake.

Conclusion: "In true contrition and humility of heart is brought forth the hope of forgiveness, the troubled conscience is reconciled, grace that was lost is recovered, a man

is secured from the wrath to come, and God meets the penitent soul in the holy kiss of peace." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 52).

MAY 16

RULES OF CONDUCT IN REGARD TO CONSOLATION

The enemy of our soul may produce in our hearts consolation which is in reality a delusion, or he may make use of the genuine consolation which comes from God in order to mislead us. Certain rules for our conduct when experiencing spiritual consolation are given by St. Francis de Sales; they are in substance: (1) We must not believe that the perception of consolation is a sign of personal goodness. God in His mercy may favor the greatest sinner with the same sentiment in order to lure him back to a life of virtue. (2) We ought to realize that very often such a feeling is given merely to allure us to the love of God. The weak and delicate are tempted with delicacies to take food for their nourishment, the strong are satisfied with coarser food. (3) When proffered by the hand of God, accept these extraordinary graces and favors humbly, and esteem them highly, but look more to the Giver than to the gift. Recognize the goodness of God in treating you so kindly. (4) Having thus humbly received them, carefully employ them according to the intention of the Donor. God gives these special signs of love so that we love Him in return with a special love. "He who loves me," He said, "keeps my commandments." Hence those who are given these marks of favor from God should be even more diligent than others in shunning evil and doing good. (5) From time to time this consolation ought to be renounced, protesting vehemently that we seek "not the consolations but the Comforter; not their deliciousness but the

sweet Saviour; not their tenderness, but Him that is the delight of Heaven and earth." Lastly if such sensible devotion be vouchsafed you in abundance, faithfully confer with your confessor, that he may give you further rules of conduct whilst in that state. A lack of all comfort is a sign of virtue if he who lacks it can conscientiously say that he is not the cause of its absence, that he is truly zealous for God's honor, and that he is loyally struggling to keep His commandments. To struggle manfully in the service of God and in the fight against sin, is proof of a deeply founded virtue and is a pledge of great merit and of an eternal reward. There is danger of these hardy souls despising the occasional tendernesses which God may send them. Such should not be their conduct. Let them humbly and gratefully receive them from the hand of God and use them as a means to greater progress in the service of God and in gaining virtue.

Resolve, "whenever you receive any spiritual consolation, to be more diligent in doing good and in humbling yourself."

Conclusion: "Oh, how good is God to such as hope in Him, to the soul that seeks Him!" "Lord, it is good for me to be with Thee, whether Thou be on the cross, or in Thy glory!" O my soul, if "thou hast found honey, eat what is sufficient for thee." (Prov. XXV, 16).

MAY 17

SPIRITUAL DRYNESS

Although in everyone's spiritual life there are times of consolation and times of dryness, yet, while preserving a holy indifference, we must try to remove, if possible, such dryness, for it is more difficult to serve God in this state than in time of consolation.

The first step in striving to gain a better state of soul is by inquiring whether we ourselves are not the cause of the spiritual dryness in our souls. It may be that God withdraws spiritual consolations from us because we take a vain complacency in them, being more attached to sensible devotion than to God, in other words, valuing the gift more than the Giver. Again, perhaps we neglect to make the most of these times of grace, not using them to advance and progress in virtue but rather resting complacently in the enjoyment of them, thus mistaking their purpose. At other times we may be so taken up with the satisfaction experienced in consolation as to neglect the ordinary spiritual exercises which we are accustomed to perform, hence rightfully meriting their withdrawal. Another reason for their loss may be insincerity in our communications with our spiritual director. If you will not be as sincere and simple as a little child, you shall not have the tender treatment of a child.

Moreover, those who indulge in the pleasures of the world excessively cannot expect the pleasures of God. The pleasures of the world are not easily compatible with the delights of Heaven. An humble examination of our conduct in the time of consolations will disclose whether we are to blame for their loss. The remedy, of course, is to remove the obstacles which we have placed in the way of spiritual consolation. If we can honestly say that, as far as we can see, the fault does not lie in us, then let us exclaim with holy Job: (I, 21): "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; . . . blessed be the name of the Lord." Be assured that spiritual exercises performed without relish, tenderness of heart, or sensible satisfaction, are none the less agreeable to His Divine Majesty. "Our works performed with tenderness of heart, or sensible satisfaction, are more agreeable to ourselves, who regard only our own satisfaction; yet when

performed in time of dryness, they possess more sweetness and become more precious in the sight of God."

Resolve to pray in time of dryness: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless not my will but thine be done."

Conclusion: Hear the good Lord say: "It is expedient for thee to fly to humble and exterior works, and to recreate thyself in good actions [in times of spiritual dryness]; to look for My coming and My heavenly visitation with an assured hope; to bear with patience thy banishment and the aridity of thy mind, till thou be visited again by Me and delivered from all anguish." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 51).

MAY 18

CONDUCT IN SPIRITUAL DRYNESS

"Our rational nature cannot continue for a long time famished, as it were, and without some kind of delight, either heavenly or earthly." When God in His inscrutable wisdom withdraws delight in His service, the novice in spiritual life, not understanding this turn in affairs, is apt to grow sad, and will sometimes seek the pleasures of the world, perhaps innocent in themselves, but calculated to draw the soul away from God. How will a faithful soul conduct herself in such times of trial? (1) It is well for the soul to humble herself and acknowledge that of herself she is like "parched soil, which, far from receiving those showers of which it stands in need, is exposed to the wind and thus is reduced to dust." (2) She should pray fervently to God for comfort, for there is none but God who can give true comfort, and He, if importuned, will restore His consolation to the soul, when she

admits that He alone is her consolation. (3) A frank avowal ought to be made to the confessor, as often the disclosure of one's state of soul is sufficient to gain a return of tranquillity. Besides, the advice of a prudent priest can help much to set the soul upon the right path, to regain the lost peace of mind, or at least counsel the way of not losing any diminution of the love of God during such periods of trial. (4) What is perhaps most important of all, is to remember that "there is nothing so profitable, so fruitful, in a state of spiritual dryness, as not to suffer our affections to be too strongly fixed upon the desire to be delivered from them. I do not say that we ought not simply to wish for deliverance, but that we should not set our heart upon it, but rather yield ourselves up to the pure mercy and special providence of God, that he may make use of us to serve Him as long as He pleases." (5) Let us not forget that this trial is common to all souls who love God and is often a test of their loyalty to God. The great St. Francis of Assisi "was once assaulted by so deep a melancholy of spirit that he could not help showing it in his behavior; for if he desired to converse with his religious, he was unable; if he withdrew himself from them, it was worse; abstinence and corporal mortification oppressed him, and prayer gave him no relief. He continued for two years in this manner, so that he seemed to be quite abandoned by God; but at length, after he had humbly suffered this violent storm, our Saviour in an instant restored him to a happy tranquillity. If the greatest saints are subject to such shocks, how can we be astonished if they sometimes happen to us?"

Resolve never to lose courage in the midst of spiritual dryness, but to wait with patience for the return of consolation.

Conclusion: O God! Thou impartest much consolation to thy servants to support them in their troubles. "If I cannot draw out of the fulness of the fountain or drink my fill, I will at least set my mouth to the orifice of this heavenly conduit

that so I may draw from thence some small drop to refresh my thirst, to the end that I may not be wholly dried up." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. IV, c. 4).

MAY 19

SPIRITUAL DRYNESS AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Another cause of spiritual dryness is infirmity. Those who are racked with pain very often find it very difficult to experience any spiritual consolation. Others of a nervous temperament are most times so mentally excited and disturbed as not to be able to keep the soul in a disposition of peace and quiet, that sweetness and consolation with which the good God so often blesses those who serve Him loyally. "It sometimes happens that spiritual dryness proceeds from an indisposition of body, as when, through an excess of watching, labor, or fasting, we find ourselves oppressed by fatigue, drowsiness, lassitude, and the like infirmities, which, though they depend on the body, yet are calculated to incommode the spirit also, on account of the intimate connection that subsist between both."

Now under such conditions, we must, as St. Francis points out, not omit acts of virtue. It is possible to perform acts of virtue with the superior part of the soul, although the whole soul seems to be sluggish and unable to act. The force of the will in acting thus under such handicaps is very pleasing to God. "For, . . . though there is less satisfaction in performing our spiritual exercises in this manner, yet there is more merit and virtue."

Care must be taken, too, to remedy, as far as possible, the indisposition of the body. Whilst preserving a holy indifference concerning one's health, the ordinary means to restore

impaired health should be resorted to. To seek to gain good health and to be in good physical condition in order the better to serve God, is not only a laudable work, but also an act of virtue.

A remedy for the lesser ills of life is to indulge in some innocent recreations. Recreation sought with this motive in mind is virtuous. The founders of the great religious orders well understood this purpose of recreation, and hence in the daily order of their lives all religious have a time allotted for innocent recreation. Whilst engaged in recreations, compatible with their religious profession, and not protracted beyond the bounds of reason, these good men and women know that they are pleasing God as much as when, at the proper time, they engage in prayer. For this reason St. Charles Borromeo, when engaged in a game of chess, on being asked what he would do if he knew that he was to die immediately, is said to have answered that he would continue playing.

Resolve to remove spiritual dryness, when it proceeds from bodily indisposition, by making use of the remedies proper to this end.

Conclusion: Listen to the words of Christ: "Son, be not dismayed with the labors which thou hast undertaken for Me; neither let tribulations quite cast thee down; but let My promise and strengthen and comfort thee in all events." (*The Following of Christ*, Bk. III, c. 47).

MAY 20

RENEWAL OF GOOD RESOLUTIONS

From time to time the good resolutions which we have formed in the course of our meditations ought to be renewed,

to renovate the soul and confirm her in devotion. Frequently ought you to renew your most important resolutions: "First, that you will forsake, cast away, destest, and renounce forever all mortal sin; secondly, that you will dedicate and consecrate your soul, heart and body, with all their faculties, to the love and service of God; thirdly, that if you should chance to fall into any sin, you will immediately rise again by the help of God's grace."

In order to persevere it is necessary very often to recall to mind these good intentions, "for human nature easily falls off from its good affections, on account of the frailty and evil inclinations of the flesh, which depress the soul and draw her always downwards unless she often raise herself up by fervent resolutions." Holy Writ tells us that "the corruptible body is a load upon the soul and the earthly habitation presses down the mind." (Wisd. IX, 15). Repetition is one of the best means of fixing something firmly in the mind. And, although the mere memory of a resolution is not yet the will to do a thing, nevertheless, to have something well fixed in the mind contributes much towards inducing the will to carry it out. By neglecting this salutary practice there is danger of the soul retrogressing from a state of devotion and lapsing into a state of indifference, which opens the way to lukewarmness and sin. The sad fate of the lukewarm is drastically described in the Apocalypse, where it is written: "Thou are neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth."

To avoid so dreadful a fate, every effort must be made to keep up the fervor of the soul. A means to this end is frequent confession and Communion. "This exercise will fortify your spirit, impaired by time, warm your heart, reanimate your good resolutions, and make your virtues flourish with fresh vigor." In your confessor you have an interested friend, who will warn, exhort, and correct when necessary. In Holy

Communion you have the blessed Saviour Himself, who will draw the soul by His sweetness, warm the heart with His love, and strengthen the will with His grace. With these aids, the renewal of our good resolutions is easy and strength of will to carry them out is assured.

Resolve frequently to renew your resolution to avoid every mortal sin and to serve God with your whole heart and soul.

Conclusion: "Grant me Thy grace, most merciful Jesus, that it may be with me and continue with me to the end. . . . Let me always will or not will the same with Thee; let me not be able to will or not will any otherwise than Thou willest or willest not." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 15).

MAY 21

PROTESTATION OF FIDELITY

Having recalled and recapitulated our good resolution never, with the grace of God, to commit a mortal sin and to strive to make progress in perfection, we ought solemnly before the heavenly court to declare, in some formula of our own making, or in a set prayer, our firm purpose to be faithful to this resolution until death. Thus our word is pledged to God; will it be kept?

Much stress is laid upon the nobility of always keeping one's word. This relates to the promises between men; how much more faithful should it be between man and His God? As the man who keeps his word is held in honor by his fellowmen, so too, the soul that keeps her pledge to God will be honored by Him. There at times may be an excuse for not keeping one's word to one's fellowman; there may be rea-

sons which make it impossible. Never, however, can there be an excuse for committing a mortal sin, never a reason which makes its avoidance impossible. A reason may be found for breaking one's allegiance to an earthly sovereign, but never can there be a just reason for being disloyal to God.

This truth is all the more impressive, since God has promised to help all men of good will who ask for His aid, and has also declared that He "will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will make also with temptation issue, that you will be able to bear it." (1 Cor. X, 13). The possibility of keeping your resolve, then, is undoubted, provided that reliance is placed on grace, and the ordinary cautions and the means of defence are faithfully used. A solemn protestation of our purpose before the heavenly court will not only rejoice the angels and saints and enlist their assistance, but will also make more firm our determination to carry it out. "The Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, your good angel, your patron, and all that blessed company behold you, and their hearts are filled with joy and exultation at your words; they see with the eyes of unspeakable love your heart prostrate at the feet of your Saviour, consecrating itself to His service." In the words of holy David you may say in their presence: "It is to Thee, O Lord! my heart hath spoken it, my heart hath uttered a good word. Oh, I will never forget it." (Ps. XLIV).

Resolve to "consider well in thy soul how holy and reasonable this protestation is, and how much to be desired."

Conclusion: "Expect the Lord, act manfully, and be of good heart; do not despond, do not fall off, but constantly offer both soul and body for the glory of God. I will reward thee most abundantly, will be with thee in all thy tribulations." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 35).

MAY 22

THE GRACE OF A DEVOUT LIFE

Those who have taken up a devout life in earnest, have much to thank Almighty God for. They must realize that to do so can only be an effect of the grace which He has so kindly bestowed upon them. They may remember by what means they were induced to follow a life of virtue, nearer and more pleasing to God. "Tell me sincerely, were you not invited to it by the sweet attractions of the Holy Ghost? Were not the cords with which God drew your little boat to this blessed haven, composed of love and charity? How earnestly did He seek to allure you to it by the divine sweetness of the Sacraments, spiritual reading and prayer!" This truth is confirmed by Holy Writ, saying: "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us." (Rom. V, 5). Some, God has called early in life to follow Him more closely. "Ah! what a happiness it is to learn early that which we cannot know but too late!" Having been called thus early in life, and having responded to God's grace, they may say with the prophet David: "Thou hast taught me, O God, from my youth; and till now I will declare Thy wonderful works." (Ps. LXX, 17).

Should you have corresponded with God's call late in life, there is all the more reason for gratitude, for, "what an extraordinary grace that, after having misspent all your former years, God should call you before your death, and stop the course of your misery at a time in which, if it had continued, you must have been miserable for all eternity." A moment's reflection will discover all the other effects a change to a devout life has caused in your soul. You will recognize how

you have broken with sin and now continually live in the grace of God, consider the consequent merit which thus accrues to your soul. Behold how you have learnt to pray and have entered into a new atmosphere charged with the supernatural. You have been inflamed with a desire of loving God and of repressing your passions for His sake. In fine you, "have communicated so much oftener than you would have done, uniting yourself to the sovereign source of grace. Ah, how great are these favors! We must weigh them in the scales of the sanctuary; it is God's right hand that has done all this. 'The right hand of the Lord,' says David, 'hath exalted me; I shall not die, but live, and shall declare with my heart, with my mouth, and by my actions, the wonderful works of the Lord.' " (Ps. CXVII).

Resolve with an act of thanksgiving and a fervent prayer to make good use of the devout life you have begun.

Conclusion: Say with St. Augustine: "O ancient Beauty! whence is it that I have known Thee so late! Alas, I saw Thee before, but considered Thee not. . . . O ancient sweetness! why did I not relish Thee before?"

MAY 23

RETROSPECTION

Suppose the reader to have embraced a devout life and to be striving to become more and more perfect, it is well here to look back and examine what the state of his soul is towards God.

The first question to be asked is: Are you firmly resolved never to commit a mortal sin? What is your attitude with respect to mortal sin? Do you consider it the greatest of all evils? Do you realize that mortal sin is the one obstacle that

can stand in your way of gaining Heaven? Have you a horror of mortal sin both because of its enormity and heinousness? Are you mindful of the base ingratitude to God which the commission of one mortal sin entails? Does the unspeakable punishment of hell loom up before you when tempted to commit a grievous sin? Has your resolution continued constant since you determined to serve God more faithfully and generously?

Then, with regard to venial sin, is it your thought that a deliberate venial is only slightly less than a mortal sin? No sin is small in the sight of God Who is sanctity itself. The progress made in avoiding deliberate venial sin may now be inquired into. "We cannot keep ourselves so pure as not to fall now and then into such sins; but is there none to which you have a particular inclination; or, what would be still worse, is there none to which you bear an affection and love?"

The answer to this latter question especially will give the key to how much real progress you have made, for those who sincerely love God, will make every effort to keep the soul free from deliberate venial sin. With regard to the commandments of God and the Church, are they irksome to you, or do you see in them a reasonable and even providential rule of life, calculated to give, not only spiritual well-being, but a natural happiness as well?

Next examine into your sentiments as to spiritual exercises. Do they give you delight or make you uneasy and at times fill you with disgust? "To which of them do you find yourself more or less inclined? To hear the word of God, to read it, to discourse of it, to meditate, to aspire to God, to go to confession, to receive spiritual counsel, to prepare yourself for holy Communion, to communicate, to restrain your affections,—in all this, what is there to which you feel repugnance? If you find anything to which your heart has less

inclination, examine the cause whence this dislike arises, and apply a remedy." Do not think that you must necessarily find matter for blame. Perhaps, by the grace of God, you are well on the way to perfection and may sincerely say that you have these resolutions in your heart, and that you delight in the practices of virtue. If you may find this the state of your soul, thank God for it.

Resolve to remedy what is faulty and to continue constant in what is good.

Conclusion: "Blessed be Thou, O my God! for though I am unworthy of all good, yet Thy generosity and infinite goodness never cease to benefit even those who are ungrateful, and that are turned away from Thee. Oh, convert us unto Thee, that we may be thankful, humble, and devout; for Thou art our salvation, our courage, and our strength. (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 8).

MAY 24

OUR LOVE OF GOD

Our love of God ought to be a source of continual joy for us. To know that we may love God and are loved by Him, is a happiness greater than any other we can experience here on earth. The mind of the true lover will naturally turn to the contemplation of the immensity, goodness, and sweetness of God. And these attributes, although unfathomably deep, will prove to be the fount from which our love of Him is fed and increased. Our thoughts will ever and ever return to God even amidst the occupations and vanities of the world. A tendency will be noticeable to turn the heart toward God, to run to meet Him, as it were. A childlike love for the heavenly Father effects these sentiments and affections for

Him. "Souls that love God well, let them be ever so busy, when the remembrance of God comes near them, they lose almost the thought of all things else, so rejoiced are they that this dear remembrance is returned." Like David, they may say: "I remembered God and was delighted."

The heart is even more affected by love of Jesus Christ. God the Father is a spirit and it is difficult to represent a spirit to the mind's eye. Christ is the manifestation of God to us, He being not only a Spirit, but also man like ourselves. We can comprehend the idea of man, being ourselves men, and seeing men around us. Hence it is easier to bestow our love upon Christ, the God-man, than upon a pure spirit. If we can feel an affection for such historical characters as enlist our admiration, or for such as have benefited mankind, which benefits have come even to ourselves, how much greater must be the love of Him whom we know to have been our greatest Benefactor, and who, unlike any other character of history, is known to have had the thought of us in mind and the intention of benefiting us personally.

Again, these benefits which He has afforded are not such as to affect merely our material comfort, but rather our eternal welfare. All material benefits are only temporal; those which Christ has gained for mankind are eternal. Moreover, all that He gives are the free gift of His love for us. We have no claim or right to what He gives. His gifts are the product of His infinite love for each one of us personally. If love should engender reciprocal love, then there can be no question of what our love for Christ should be. This love is so easily attracted, as He Himself is so amiable. To know Him is to love Him.

Resolve to seek your happiness in thinking of Christ and to feel a tender affection towards Him.

Conclusion: "O God, my holy Lover, when Thou shalt come into my heart, all that is within me shall be filled with

joy, Thou art my glory and the joy of my heart. Thou art my hope and my refuge in the day of my tribulation." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 5).

MAY 25

LOVE FOR THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN

The love of God and that for the saints go hand in hand. The soul that loves God will love the friends of God. And even if the saints did not have such wonderful attractions to make us love them, we would, if we are genuine friends of God, love them for His sake. In the first place there is His Blessed Mother, Mary. She is the universal friend of man and should be loved by all. She is to be loved by all men because Christ has given her to us as our spiritual Mother; she ought to be loved because her endowments of soul and body are such as to attract the admiration and esteem of every one; and she should be loved because it is the will of her Divine Son. May and October are times especially set aside for this congenial task of honoring and venerating the Blessed Virgin Mary.

No man truly loves Jesus Christ unless he also in some way venerates His Blessed Mother. Even those outside the Church who love God sincerely, have some kind of veneration for Christ's Mother, be it only high esteem and respect. Catholics will go to any length to honor her, stopping only this side of adoration, which, of course, is reserved for God alone. From the cradle to the grave, the Catholic child hears of Mary, learns to love her, and finds in her his greatest consolation outside of God.

Besides the Blessed Virgin Mary, the other saints are loved and venerated by the faithful, according to the appeal

their lives make to the individual soul. One will choose this saint, another that for his model. The features of the life of one saint will engender love and veneration in one soul, while the characteristics of some other saint will elicit the same sentiments in another. Here the Church allows full freedom; we may choose whom we will for our patrons, and honor them as we will, provided only that we limit our veneration to the canonized saints and observe the laws laid down by the Church for the veneration of the saints. As it is only natural that we should have friends here upon earth whom we respect and love more than other men, so we may have friends in the world beyond, with whom we may treat more familiarly than with others. This may be done through the Communion of Saints. Reading occasionally the life of some saint will help much in this direction.

Resolve to venerate assiduously the Blessed Virgin Mary, your patron saints, and all the holy men and women declared by the Church to be in Heaven.

Conclusion: "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, Communion of Saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen."

MAY 26

THE LOVE OF OURSELVES

Some think that all self love is sinful and detrimental to the acquisition of virtue. This is a mistaken idea. It is not only proper, but a duty, to harbor self love. We may deduce this from the commandment of the Lord to love our neighbor *as ourselves*. This command not only presupposes that we may love ourselves, but that we may do so in a high degree, for we know that our love for our neighbor must be

generous, therefore the love of ourselves must be equally great. The danger here, and that is what those allude to who fear all self love, is that our love of self may not be of the right kind or be excessive. St. Francis de Sales puts it in these words: "To love yourself too much for this world," or not to "love yourself for Heaven." Hence the self love which God wills that we should have, must be fostered in due order. "For the inordinate love of ourselves is the only thing that will cause our ruin. Now, a well-ordered love requires that we should love the soul more than the body; that we should be more solicitous to acquire virtue than anything else; that we should set a higher estimation on the favor of Heaven than on the honor of this low and perishable world."

The proper love of ourselves requires furthermore that we seek in the first place and before all the salvation of our own souls; that we neglect every other consideration, when there is question of procuring assistance for our souls, in combating our passions and gaining the necessary strength to resist temptations to sin. Nor must humility be wanting. We may be humble in our relations with Almighty God, but we must be equally so with regard to our fellow-men. This humility consists in not esteeming ourselves above others, and in not desiring to be so esteemed by others. For this reason we must use great caution in not sinning by the tongue, by boasting of ourselves in one way or the other or flattering ourselves in our conversations with others. The golden rule is to speak as little as possible of ourselves. Consideration for the body is also in keeping with a proper love of self, only it should not go to excess. For instance, we know that a certain amount of recreation is not only desirable, but necessary, in order that the body may be a willing helper of the soul in the pursuit of virtue. However, if you allow yourself pleasure contrary to health or so protracted as to distract the soul, it is

evidently excessive. "I mean vain or unprofitable pleasure; such, for example, as that which prevents you from retiring to bed at a proper hour and the like."

Resolve "that thy love of self shall be pure, simple, and well-ordered, and thou shalt not be a captive to anything." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 27).

Conclusion: "Grant me, O Lord, what I ought to know, to love what I ought to love, to praise that which is most pleasing to Thee, to esteem that which is valuable in Thy sight, to despise that which is despicable in Thine eyes." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 50).

MAY 27

THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOR

It is well, after considering the love we owe to ourselves, to consider whether we are observing the other portion of the command namely; to love our neighbor as ourselves. Many men fail by an excess of self love. It is well nigh impossible to sin by an excess of love for our neighbor, provided the love is a spiritual one. At times, almost inadvertently false suspicions about others arise in the mind; there is a secret satisfaction when things go wrong with them, and all because of some secret dislike entertained against them. Either this dislike arises spontaneously or is caused by some speech or action of our neighbor which has offended us. We would not dare to express this dislike in words, we do not wish to admit to ourselves that it is in our souls, yet a sincere and candid probe of the soul would show all too plainly that there is a sinful antipathy towards those whom we dis-

like. Those who genuinely love Christ and wish to love their neighbors for the love of Him, will seek to remove such antipathy from their souls. The dislike which we feel toward others may not be easily eradicated, as we are all human and have human weaknesses always with us. However, we may counteract this feeling, especially by prayer, first of all for strength to overcome our feelings and, secondly, sincere prayer for the individual against whom the uncharitable feeling arises. This course of action will soften our hearts and benefit our neighbor. Until we are able to bring ourselves to pray for those whom we dislike we are not able to say that we love our neighbor as ourselves, or as God wishes us to.

Do you love your neighbor? "To discern this well, you must represent to yourself troublesome and disagreeable persons, because it is among them that we exercise the love of God towards our neighbor, and even more among those who injure us, either by their actions or their words. Examine well whether your heart be well disposed towards them, or whether you do not find a greater repugnance to love them. Are you not apt to speak ill of your neighbors, and especially of such as do not love you? Do you refrain from doing evil to your neighbors either directly or indirectly?" An honest answer to these questions, and the adoption of the remedy if you have failed, will do much, not only to bring Christian love of your neighbor into your heart, but to advance you in the love of God.

Resolve for God's sake to love every man with a genuine Christian love.

Conclusion: "What can anyone do against Thee by words or injuries? He hurteth himself rather than Thee; nor can he escape the judgment of God, whoever he be. See thou have God before thine eyes, and contend not with complaining words." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 36).

MAY 28

THE PASSIONS

The knowledge we have sought and found of the state of our soul with regard to God, ourself, and our neighbor, will disclose another helpful point of information, namely the passion or passions, which are the source of most of our failings. We ought to be able to discover whether our faults spring from the passion of love, hatred, desire, hope, sadness, or joy. We should be able to ascertain if we have an inordinate love of riches, pleasures, and honors; if we have a too great a fear of the loss of worldly goods; if we have an excessive desire for the comforts of the world and of creatures; if our souls are prone to sadness, or, contrariwise, too, much attached to joy. "In a word, we must examine what affections entangle our heart, what passions possess it, in what it has principally strayed out of the way."

We may thus see what progress we have made in combating our predominant passion, whether this passion has not now been changed to another, and whether we are fighting this other with the same energy we employed towards the old one. When a dike has sprung a leak and is repaired, very often the water will break through elsewhere, because the whole dike is weak. It will be necessary to strengthen it all along the line. So our nature, which is weak, when one passion is controlled, will often give way elsewhere, unless it is strengthened against all passions. Hence it is evident that there must be continual vigilance. The passions never die, their growth may be stunted, but the roots remain, and a constant watch must be kept lest they sprout forth anew. Once vigilance is neglected, they will spring up with incredible

speed. As long as he lives a man may never sit back and say to himself: "Now the battle is won!" Either through a ruse of the devil or because of strict discipline the passions may seem dormant for a while, but they will rise again and surprise us, unless we are ever on the alert and ready to suppress the very first indications of their reawakening. However, this fact need not discourage any one. The grace of God is equally strong, and when man is determined to co-operate with it, a force is at hand which will make it possible to overcome passion, no matter how strong, wily, or persistent its attacks may be.

The important thing, however, is to recognize our predominant passion, to exercise vigilance against it, and never to give up the fight, no matter how often we may have succumbed to it in the past.

Resolve "not to go after thy concupiscence, but to turn away from thy own will." (Eccl. XVIII, 30).

Conclusion: "O Lord, patience, as I perceive, is very necessary for me, because this life is exposed to many adversities. For notwithstanding all that I can do to live in peace, my life cannot be without war and sorrow." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 12).

MAY 29

RENEWAL OF OUR GOOD RESOLUTIONS

After this brief review of what progress we have made in the love of God, the love of our neighbor, and of our own souls for the love of God, it were well to renew the good resolutions which we have made while reading this book; especially let us renew the fundamental resolutions. If we find that we have made some progress, however small, we have

reason to thank God and to acknowledge "that it has been his mercy alone that has wrought in and for us." Most of us will most probably have to admit that our progress, if any, has been exceedingly slow. The advice is therefore given that you "humble yourself exceedingly before God, acknowledging that if you have not advanced much, it has been through your own fault, because you have not faithfully, courageously, and constantly corresponded with the inspirations, graces, and affections which He has given you in prayer and at other times." In all humility and contrition you ought to ask pardon for your infidelity and disloyalty in not corresponding with His graces. Resolve once again to rid yourself of mortal sin, should you be in that deplorable state, to break once and for all with your sinful habits, and never with the help of God to commit a mortal sin in the future. Having accomplished this much,—and every Christian must succeed thus far who wishes to gain eternal salvation,—resolve to avoid also, as far as human frailty will permit, all deliberate venial sins. Do not waver in this good resolution, even though you may have many failures to answer for; a continuous effort will, with God's help, bring success. Often "beseech God to make you forever faithful to Him."

After you have cleared your heart from sin and the affection for sin, strive also to advance in virtue. In this regard, the most pleasing to our Lord and Master, is conformity in all things to His holy will. Often pray in the words of à Kempis: "Grant me always to desire and to will that which is most acceptable to Thee, and which pleaseth Thee best. Let Thy will be mine, and let my will always follow Thine, and agree perfectly with it. Let me always will or not will the same with Thee, and let me be unable to will or not will otherwise than as Thou willest or willest not." (Bk. III, c. 15). In this resolution of conforming to the will of God in all

things will be comprehended all other virtues, and they will naturally be taken up, one by one and made our own.

Resolve to "offer God your heart, that he may make Himself sole Master of it."

Conclusion: O Lord "Behold, I am Thy servant, prepared for all, for I do not desire to live for myself, but for Thee. Oh, that I could do so worthily and perfectly!" (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 15).

MAY 30

THE SOUL

After renewing our good resolutions, considerations calculated to strengthen us in keeping them will not be out of place. We may start by considering the soul. God cannot be sufficiently admired in His universe. Gazing into the skies we behold vast spaces which seem to have no limit. This impression is our nearest approach to what is infinite. When we are told that the star nearest to us is 93,000,000 miles away, and that the next nearest is 280,000 times as far as the nearest, our minds grow dizzy at the very thought of such vast spaces. Again, when we learn that the stars in the milky way are so numerous as to give the impression that the sky is streaked with white, we receive an idea not only of the distances of the constellation from us, but also of the vast number of individual bodies which composes them. Our earth is one of these innumerable worlds and one of the smaller ones at that. And yet, how large it seems to us! The size of the mountains and the depths of the oceans always call forth our wonderment. How small man appears in comparison to

all these larger creatures! Nevertheless he is greater than any one of them or all of them put together. The reason is because he has a soul. All other creatures serve God necessarily by virtue of their creation. Man may give God a voluntary service by virtue of free will. Creatures other than man are innumerable and great, but man is master of them all by reason of his soul. All other creatures of this earth God made for man. God said: "Let us make man to our image and likeness: and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth. And God created man to His own image: to the image of God He created him." (Gen. I, 26, 27). This likeness, as we know, is in the soul. God is a spirit and the soul is a spirit. God has understanding and free will and the soul is endowed with understanding and free will. God is without end and the soul is without end. The soul then, of all creatures, is the nearest approach to God. It is almost as though the soul were a little god. Yet how little some men value it! They give far more attention to the body and its needs than to the soul that will live forever! Have we an adequate estimation of the excellence of the soul, and a proper understanding of the necessity of providing for its eternal welfare?

Resolve to grasp the high meaning of the soul's excellence and to prize it accordingly.

Conclusion: "O Lord my God, who hast created me to Thine own image and likeness, give me this grace which thou hast declared to be so great and so necessary to salvation,—that I may overcome my corrupt nature, which draweth me to sin and perdition." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk III, c. 55).

MAY 31

UNDERSTANDING

That which raises man so high above the animal is the faculty called understanding. Through this gift he is able to think, to reason, to plan, to deduce one truth from another, to attain and retain knowledge. An animal is guided by blind instinct. It cannot think or reason. The bird always builds its nest in the same way, and has done so as long as records exist. Though circumstances may clearly show that another method or another position would be more advantageous, the bird makes no change, because it cannot reason, but continues mechanically to build its nest in the same way. Man, on the contrary, endowed with understanding, is capable of knowing not only this visible world which he perceives with his senses, but also that there is a God, which truth he is able to deduce from what he sees about him. "For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood from the things that are made." (Rom. I, 29). Moreover, through revelation we know that there are angels, an eternity, a Heaven. Besides, "the understanding knows the means of living well in this world, that the soul may one day be associated with the angels of Heaven and enjoy God for all eternity." In the Sacrament of Confirmation understanding, one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, is imparted to the soul, so that the natural forces of this faculty may be augmented to know more clearly the mysteries of faith. "The more a man is united within himself, and interiorly simple, the more and higher things does he understand without labor; because he receiveth the light of under-

standing from above." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 3). This, then, is the noblest work of the understanding to engage itself in the search for the knowledge of God. "But because many make it more their study to know, than to live well, therefore are they often deceived, and bring forth none, or very little fruit. . . . The humble knowledge of thyself is a surer way to God, than the deepest search after science. Learning is not to be blamed, nor the mere knowledge of things, which is good in itself and ordained by God; but a good conscience and a virtuous life are always to be preferred." (*Ibid.*)

Resolve, knowing God, to glorify God, to glorify Him and to give thanks, not to become vain in thought lest your heart be darkened. (Rom. I, 21).

Conclusion: O God! "I am Thy servant, give me understanding that I may know Thy testimonies."

JUNE 1

THE WILL

Besides the understanding the soul possesses another faculty, namely, free will. This is the greatest natural gift God has bestowed upon man. It is a clear proof of man's likeness to God. By the gift of free will God has given to man a faculty similar to His own. By this prerogative man is a master who cannot be forced. God Himself will not interfere with the freedom of man's will, since in His goodness, He has granted man this wonderful attribute. Free will gives man the power to act or not to act, to choose or not to choose, to sin or not to sin, to gain salvation or to lose his soul.

The matter of salvation is preeminently a matter of the will. Those will be saved who have the will to be saved.

True, the will is dependent upon the understanding, for before the will can choose, it is necessary for the understanding to present the objects from which a selection is to be made. Before a determination can be formed to act or not to act, the various possible actions must be suggested by the understanding. Again, before a sin can be committed, there must be a knowledge of sin and the conviction that this particular action or omission is a sin, which is the work of the understanding. Moreover, there must be a knowledge at least in some vague manner of God, of the immortality of the soul, and of a reward or punishment after death, which may be gained by man's understanding, especially when aided by God's grace, sufficient of which is given to every man to enable him to be saved. Before possessing such knowledge the will cannot desire nor will to be saved. But all the work of the understanding without the action of the will is unavailing, for the determining factor is the will. What is more, the will is not only capable of acting for selfish motives, but can and is influenced also by generous and noble impulses, as, for instance, the love of God for His own sake, and the love neighbor for the sake of God. How different, then, is the praise which man gives to His Creator from that offered by irrational creatures! All creatures not possessed of free will honor their Creator through blind force. Man, because of this God-given freedom of the will, honors God of his own free choice, making his action meritorious and pleasing to God. The voluntary service which he gives to his Divine Master is one of the reasons for God's great love for man. God loves all his creatures, He pronounced them all good after their creation, but this attraction in man made possible by a voluntary praise of God, draws God, as it were, to that particularly tender and superabundant love for man.

Resolve to love and praise your Creator with all the force and power of your will.

Conclusion: O Lord! "Grant me always to desire and will that which is most acceptable to Thee, and which pleaseth Thee best." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 15).

June 2

PEACE TO MEN OF GOOD WILL

Since the will of man is free, it might be supposed that to gratify every whim and fancy would be for him the acme of satisfaction, joy, and happiness. This however, is not the case. Although the freedom of the will gives man the ability of doing whatever he desires, yet the gratification of every desire is not good for man, as a glance at the fate of a drunkard or libertine will show. Only one thing can give man genuine peace and happiness in this world, and that is, to make his will comformable to the will of His Creator in all things. "Our heart, alas! runs eagerly in pursuit of creatures, thinking that they will satisfy its desires; but as soon as it has overtaken them, it finds its satisfaction still afar off, God being unwilling that our heart should find any resting place, that it may return to Himself, from whom it proceeded." Thomas à Kempis says in *The Following of Christ* that in every action we should make our will comformable to God's by saying: "Lord, if this be pleasing to Thee, let it be done thus. Lord, if it be to Thy honor, let it be done in Thy name. Lord, if Thou seest that this is expedient, and approvest of it as profitable for me, then grant that I may use it to Thine honor." (Bk. III, c. 15).

If we make God's will our will, we shall be happy. Our happiness in this life will be proportionate to our conformity to the will of God. The Creator has demonstrated His will by the laws of nature, He has expressed it through the

Decalogue, and He continues to reveal it through His Church. To keep God's laws, then, is the first step in conforming our will to His. We ought not, however, to stop here, but proceed to the more perfect following of God's will; as the same writer says: "Offering thyself with thy whole heart to the will of God, not seeking the things that are thine, either in little or great, either in time or in eternity. So that with the same equal countenance thou continue giving thanks, both in prosperity and in adversity, weighing all things in an equal balance." Such resignation to the will of God in everything is not easy. We know that everything is willed, or at least permitted by God, and as God wills and permits only what is for our good if we wish to conform perfectly to His will, we must, in the good or evil which may befall us, bow to His will.

Resolve to be submissive to the will of God in all things.

Conclusion: "Thou knowest, O Lord, what is best; let this or that be done as Thou wilt. Give what Thou wilt, how much Thou wilt, and at the time Thou wilt. Do with me as Thou knowest, and as best pleaseth Thee, and is most for Thy honor. Put me where Thou wilt and do with me in all things according to Thy will." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 15).

JUNE 3

THE WILL AND SIN

Just as the harmony of our will with God's is the essence of sanctity, so discordance with the will of God is the characteristic of wickedness. It is the will that is the cause of sin. The world may seduce, the devil may suggest, and the flesh may allure to sin, but no sin is committed unless the will gives its consent. And, thanks be to God, no power in Heaven

or on earth can force the will, since the Creator in His goodness decreed that man's will should be free. Hence, to him that consents is rightfully imputed the blame, and to him that resists temptation is given the credit, allowing always for the grace of God, which does not coerce the will, yet without which no temptation can be successfully resisted.

This very fact, too, is the reason for the punishment of the sinner and the reward of him who resists temptation. Without the freedom of the will there could be neither reward nor punishment. Men have strenuously tried to force the will of others, and with equal strength has this assault been repulsed by those who were determined to preserve their God-given freedom. Torture, dishonor, and death have been endured rather than give up this prerogative, and the will has remained unconquered. Martyrdom is an evidence of man's unyielding freedom. The man who commits sin, then, perverts his freedom; he turns his love of the Creator to the love of creatures; he chooses to please himself rather than God. No force makes him act thus, but it is the free choice of his will.

To avert such a calamity the devout man seeks to avoid all influences that may allure his will to evil. He acknowledges that "this is the work of a perfect man, never to let one's mind slacken from attending to heavenly things, and to pass through many cares as it were without care; not after the manner of a sluggard, but by a certain prerogative of a free mind which does not cleave with inordinate affection to anything created." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 26). Hence he prays in the words of the same author: "O my God! unspeakable sweetness, make me look upon as bitter all carnal comfort which withdraws me from the love of things eternal and wickedly allures me to itself, by setting before me some present delightful good. Let not flesh and blood prevail against me; let them not overcome me; let not

the world and its transitory glory deceive me; let not the devil and his craftiness trip me up. Give me fortitude, that I may stand my ground; Patience, that I may endure; and constancy, that I may persevere." (*Ibid.*)

Resolution: "I will receive with indifference from Thy hand, good and evil, sweet and bitter, joy and sorrow, and will give Thee thanks for all that happeneth to me. Keep me from all sin, and I will fear neither death nor hell." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 17).

Conclusion: "Lord, provided my will remain but right and firm towards Thee, do with me whatsoever it shall please Thee." (*Ibid.*)

JUNE 4

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

The immortality of the soul shall not be proved here, as these lines are intended for Catholics who harbor no doubt concerning this truth. Once the soul is created by God, it will live forever. No power in Heaven or on earth can annihilate that soul, except God, who will not do so. Belief in this truth gives man an entirely different aspect of life. He who believes naturally attaches greater importance to his welfare after death than he who believes in no hereafter. The former lives so as to ensure a happy future, the latter lives only for the joys of the present. The man of faith bears the miseries of life with the thought that they will soon end and that there will be no such ills in the future. The man of the world considers pain and misery the greatest of evils, as they interfere with his enjoyment of life, which he knows is slowly but inevitably ebbing away, and every lost pleasure can never, he holds, be regained. How much more peaceful,

serene, and joyful is the existence of the believing Christian! Encouraged by the virtue of hope, he goes through life accepting its innocent joys from the hand of God as a foretaste of Heaven, and because of the same virtue, he is enabled to endure the hardships of life with the assurance that they will surely come to an end, and if he only remains faithful to his God, they will be a source of eternal happiness for him after death.

The world cannot understand the cheerfulness, patience, and resignation of those stricken down with an incurable malady, or permanently disabled by some unfortunate accident. The secret of this enviable "morale" is belief in the immortality of the soul. The fact that this misery will not last beyond death, and that there will be a time when the sufferer will be unspeakably happy, gives a viewpoint of life which those who have not faith cannot comprehend. These sufferers understand that "peace shall come in a day, which is known to the Lord; and it shall not be a vicissitude of day and night, such as at present, but everlasting light, infinite brightness, steadfast peace, and secure rest." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 47). Life even at its best is but short, unsatisfying, and dismal, without the hope of a better life to come. For those, on the other hand, who expect a future state of happiness, misery and misfortune are but stepping stones to a better, brighter and happier existence upon which they hope to enter.

Resolution: "Elevate your soul with this consideration: remind her that she is immortal and worthy of eternity; animate her with courage on this subject."

Conclusion: "O most happy mansion of the city above! Or most bright day of eternity, which no night ever darkeneth, but the Supreme Truth ever enlighteneth; a day always joyful, always secure, and never changing its state for the contrary. Oh, that this day should shine upon us, and all

those temporal things come to an end!" (*The Following of Christ, Bk.* III, c. 48).

JUNE 5

VIRTUE AND THE SOUL

The soul, possessed of understanding and free will, and endowed with immortality, can be satisfied by nothing else than virtue and devotion. As sin is the ruin of the soul, so virtue is its salvation. As sin is the cause of the soul's unhappiness, so virtue is the source of its happiness. Likewise, sin makes the soul hideous, whereas virtue makes it beautiful. What a contrast between virtue and vice! Vice in the soul is like the note which causes a discord; virtue is harmony with the design of God. Vice is like an ugly blemish marring an otherwise beautiful picture! virtue is like the light and shade which complement the artist's painting and make it more beautiful. The contrast is even more forcibly expressed by a comparison between the virtuous and the vicious man. Take for example, the difference between the patient man and the man given to anger. The patient man is loved by all; the very brute creation seems to recognize this quality in the man of meekness. The children love him, the old delight to be in his presence, while his company is sought by his equals. The angry man, on the contrary, is shunned. Neither man nor beast wish to be in his company, but flee from him whenever possible. The same is true of the humble man and the proud man. The one attracts, whereas the other repels. No one is so little conscious of his real worth as the humble man, and no one is so blind to his own faults as the proud man. The liberal man goes about doing good with his

possessions according to his means, the covetous man is always concerned about increasing his wealth, is always worried about its preservation, and is ever complaining when asked to part with even a small portion of it for the amelioration of misfortune. The generous Christian is in sympathy with his fellowman, he is able to enter into another's thought and feeling. The envious man, on the contrary, is suspicious of his neighbor, unfeeling, and covets his neighbor's goods, both of soul and body. The temperate man can enjoy spiritual joys and is not dependent upon mere material things to afford him pleasure. The intemperate man can find no pleasure except in excess and rioting, in boisterousness and revellings. "Virtues have this admirable quality that they delight the soul with an incomparable sweetness and satisfaction after we have practiced them; whereas vices leave the soul exceedingly fatigued and disordered. Why do we not endeavor to acquire this satisfaction?"

Resolution: "We ought to renew our resolution and excite ourselves to fervor every day, as if it were the first day of our conversion."

Conclusion: "Help me, O Lord, in my resolution and in Thy holy service, give me grace this day perfectly to begin; for what I have hitherto done is nothing."

JUNE 6

VICE AND THE SOUL

Because vice is as foreign matter in the soul, its presence there causes trouble. A cinder in the eye causes irritation and inflamation, but the soothing drops of some lotion which is sometimes prescribed, has just the opposite effect, strengthening the eye-sight and giving better vision. Vice

causes a moral lesion in the soul. As pain, misery, and unhappiness are experienced when there is a physical injury, so mental pain, such as uneasiness of soul, remorse, and unhappiness ensue when vice enters the soul. A lapse into sickness in an ordinarily healthy person usually does not last long and is easily cured, but a chronic invalid is far more difficult to cure. A fall into grievous sin is most dangerous for the soul; however, when only a single act, it is more easily repented of and a resolution of amendment more apt to be kept than if sin is habitually committed by one who has contracted a vice. A bad habit is difficult to cure, and there is the likelihood of falling back into the same sin again and again. By vice the soul is weakened, just as the body is weakened by protracted illness. Reaction to the remedies offered and the power of recuperation are lacking. The soul thus enervated can regain spiritual health and happiness only with the closest co-operation with the grace of God. It is not surprising then that: "with respect to vices, he that has but little of them is uneasy, and he that has more of them is more discontented; but as for virtues, he that has but a little has already some contentment, which increases as the virtues themselves increase." Hence those who are given to vice, "even whilst they are living, enjoy them not, without an admixture of bitterness, irksomeness, and fear. For the very same thing in which they conceive a delight doth often bring upon them a punishment of sorrow. It is but just it should be so, that since they inordinately seek and follow their pleasures, they should not satisfy them without confusion and uneasiness. Oh, how short, how deceitful, how inordinate and base are all these pleasures! Yet through sottishness and blindness men understand this not; but like brute beasts for a small pleasure in this mortal life, they incur the eternal death of the soul." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 12).

Resolution: "Go not after thy lusts, but, turn away from they own will." (Eccl. XVIII, 30).

Conclusion: "O devout life! how fair, how lovely, how sweet and delightful thou art! Thou alleviatest our tribulations and addest sweetness to our consolation; without thee good is evil, and pleasures are full of restlessness, trouble, and deceit."

JUNE 7

THE SOULS OF THE SAINTS

The saints well understood the immortality of the soul. They were living examples of the life that must be lived when the soul is estimated at its proper value. Their whole outlook upon life and the world around them was influenced by their valuation of the soul. This fact is beautifully brought out when we consider the saints according to the categories to which they have been assigned.

As the angels are divided into nine choirs, so the saints are commonly grouped into various classes, the chief characteristic of each saint being the distinguishing mark for his place in a particular class. Christ's selection of a certain few to bear witness to His public life, death and resurrection is the reason for calling them the apostles. Their preeminent purity assigns others to the rank of virgins. An intrepid courage in giving up their lives for their Divine Master entitles others to be grouped among the martyrs. While others are to be found among the prophets because of their gift of foretelling the future, or among the confessors because of their loyal profession of the faith, and so on.

To single out a class, let us take the virgins. Consider how

these lovable souls viewed the pleasures of life. A soul in this class "is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. . . . For he that hath determined being steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but having power of his own will; and hath judged this in his heart to keep his virginity, doth well." (1 Cor. VII, 32, 37.) And in the case of the individual being a woman, the same Apostle says: "The virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and soul (V, 34). "Behold that innumerable train of holy virgins, whiter than the lilies in purity, fairer than the roses in charity; of whom some at twelve, others at thirteen, fifteen, twenty, and twenty-five years of age, have endured a thousand kinds of martyrdom rather than renounce their resolution, not only with regard to the profession of faith, but also their protestation of devotion." The one all-engrossing thought of these holy men and women was to please God, accounting as small the sacrifice of any and all pleasures, either lawful or prohibited, which might prove an impediment to beautifying the soul for God. Anything earthly, anything of the flesh was considered irksome, when compared to the things of the soul. That the soul should please God was the first and foremost thought, to which everything else had to be subservient. The soul must always have the first consideration, such was the value set upon the soul by the saints of God.

Resolve to "consider the examples of the saints in every condition of life. What have they not done to devote themselves to the love and service of God?"

Conclusion: O Lord! "It ought not seem much to me to serve Thee; but this rather should seem great and wonderful to me, that Thou vouchsafest to receive me so wretched and unworthy into Thy service, and to associate me with Thy beloved servants."

JUNE 8

THE SAINTS AS MODELS

No matter what our vocation in life, there is the example of some saint which teaches us the manner in which we should live so as to sanctify our souls and thereby gain salvation. Be it the good St. Joseph, the model for fathers and all men in general, be it the Blessed Virgin Mary, the model of all women and girls. Or, if we are confused by the sublimity of these exalted examples, we have the lesser saints, who seem to approach more nearly our less perfect way of spiritual life. A St. John Berchmans or a St. Agnes for the young, a St. Joachim and a St. Ann for the older. In fact there are so many saints that a familiarity with their lives will suggest for every one a model whose life the zealous man or woman will be able to parallel with more or less perfection. It is so much easier to work after a model.

The devout person will therefore select some congenial saint for his patron, not only for spiritual aid, but more especially as a model upon which to form his own spiritual life. The lives of the saints form a perfect pattern for those who wish to sanctify their souls. All we need to do is to examine these lives carefully for their salient traits. "Consider the constancy with which so many holy confessors have despised the world; how invincible they have shown themselves in their resolutions, from which nothing could ever divert them; they have embraced them without reserve, and practiced them without exception. Good God! what admirable things does St. Augustine relate of his holy mother, St. Monica? With what constancy did she pursue her determination of serving God, both in marriage and in widowhood? How ad-

mirably does St. Jerome speak of his dear daughter Paula, in the midst of so many oppositions, in the midst of such a variety of accidents? What is there that we might not do after such excellent patterns? They were what we are; they served the same God and practiced the same virtues. Why then should we not do as much, according to our condition and vocation, to preserve our resolution and holy protestation?" There is no doubt but that the examples of the saints are numerous, and we would become what they were if we but sought to follow in their foot-steps.

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time."

Many lack courage, others in false humility dare not strive for so lofty a goal. But I am able to do all things in Him that strengtheneth me.

Resolve to "look upon the bright examples of the holy fathers, in whom true perfection and religion shone brilliantly, and thou wilt see how little, almost nothing, is that which we do." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 18).

Conclusion: O my soul! "Would to God that advancement in virtues were not wholly asleep in thee, who hast often seen many examples of the devout." (*Ibid.*)

JUNE 9

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR US

After the fall of Adam and Eve and their dismissal from the garden of Eden, men increased in number and "spread

over the earth, almost all opposed in manners, characters, passions, interests, and yet almost all agreeing on one point, in forgetting their last end, in offending God, in serving the devil, in dying as sinners and reprobates, and in precipitating themselves forever into hell. The holy Trinity, which suffices to itself, which finds its happiness in its own perfections, without having need of creatures, instead of overwhelming men with its justice, cast upon them looks of pity and mercy." St. Ignatius, (*Spiritual Exercises*, p. 139). Then, as it were, the Son of God spoke and said: "Sacrifices, and oblations and holocausts for sin Thou wouldst not, neither are they pleasing to Thee; then said I, behold I come to do Thy will O God." (Ps. XXXIX 8 sq.) For thirty-three years the Son of God made man performed the holy will of His Father with all perfection, subjecting Himself in humility and obedience to toil and hardships, for the one purpose of atoning for the sins of men. He had nothing to gain for Himself, for as the Son of God He was infinitely happy in Himself. It was, therefore, a pure work of love for man. When we consider that man was utterly unworthy of such love, and that his whole history would counsel just the opposite action on the part of God, God's great love for man becomes all the more striking. From the fratricide that Cain perpetrated upon his bother Abel to the crucifixion of Christ there is one long series of crimes, even among God's chosen and favored people, not to speak of the idolatry and immorality that was rampant among the gentiles. Well might the Psalmist ask: "Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" (Ps. VIII, 5). The love of God for sinful man is an impenetrable mystery. We have every reason to admit our utter lack of worthiness of His great love and to confess: "All that we have in soul and body, all that we possess within or without, by nature or grace,

are Thy benefits, and commend Thy bounty, mercy, and goodness, from whom we have received all good. (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 22).

Resolve to admire and adore the boundless goodness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Conclusion: O Lord! "Give me grace to understand Thy will, and to commemorate with great reverence and diligent consideration all Thy benefits, as well in general as in particular, that I may be able worthily to give Thee thanks for them. But I know and confess that I am not able to return Thee due thanks, not even for the least of them." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 22.)

JUNE 10

CHRIST AND YOUR SOUL

The value of a soul and the care that should be taken to ensure its salvation is clearly discernible from the life of Christ. The sole reason for His coming upon this earth and taking a body and soul like ours, was to redeem souls. If our souls were not valuable, why should God be concerned about them? Not satisfied with redeeming them, He chose a manner of redemption calculated to attract our love and gratitude and inclined to lead us gently to an understanding of the value of our souls and of the need and advantage of caring for them so as to obtain eternal happiness. Thus His whole life, from the manger to the Cross, was an appeal for the one thing necessary, that is to save our souls. Undoubtedly there were many other ways of redeeming mankind that might have been chosen by the infinite wisdom of God. Yet we cannot conceive of another plan so perfect and so

well adapted to win our love for the Redeemer as the one selected. The mystery of the Incarnation is so human and yet so divine. That Christ should choose a human mother whom He might love, who could love us, and whom we might love, is a master-stroke of divine wisdom. He came as a helpless child, so that in loving Him we seem to do Him a kindness, whereas in reality He favors us beyond description by allowing us to love Him. The coming first of the shepherds and then of the three wise men of the East shows that the lowly and ignorant are equally welcome with the intellectual and learned. The circumcision and the presentation in the temple disclose His humility in choosing not to be above the law, although He, as the lawgiver, was in nowise obliged to observe it. His hidden life in Nazareth leaves to our imagination a picture of the harmony, peace, and edification that reigned there. In all these incidents we see the restraint of the God-man, whose divinity was tenderly concealed to attract our poor love, which might have been abashed at the majesty of God, since upon sober thought we cannot but be aware of our unworthiness. Yet all this and more was done by an all-merciful Saviour to attract our love and, through love, to lead us to a right understanding of the value of the soul and of the necessity and advantage of gaining everlasting happiness with God. Spurred on with such thoughts, how can man reject so happy a destiny and not make an effort to gain so priceless a boon for his immortal soul?

Resolution: "Keep thyself with Jesus both in life and death, and commit thyself to His care, who alone can help thee when all others fail." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 7).

Conclusion: "Blessed is he who knoweth what it is to love Jesus, and to despise himself for the sake of Jesus." (*Ibid.*)

JUNE 11

CHRIST'S VALUATION OF A SOUL

We know that once the redemption of mankind was decreed, the Redeemer might have saved the souls of all men by shedding one drop of His precious Blood. However, "just as the merits of Christ alone were not enough to make amends for the original sin of Adam without his own repentance, so neither will they blot out your sins without your repentance." (*Short Meditations,* p. 181). For genuine repentance it is necessary that a man realize the offence God suffers by sin and the temerity of the sinner to perpetrate such an outrage against His Master and Creator. To gain such knowledge from a mere consideration of sin in itself, especially when the mind is blinded by ignorance and passion, is no light task. To gauge the heinousness of sin and the value of redemption by considering what Christ thought of sin and the value of redemption, gives man a more serious view and a more vivid realization of the true meaning of sin and value of redemption. If anything shows the importance of the redemption, it is the hidden life of Christ in the little city of Nazareth.

The redemption of mankind by the shedding of one drop of His precious blood, which is of infinite value, would have made but a small impression on the hearts of men. Christ's preparation of thirty years by His hidden life in Nazareth at once imbues our souls with the importance attached to this task by Christ. In what this preparation consisted Holy Scripture does not tell us. The meager account given by the

inspired writers is summed up in the sentence: "He came down to Nazareth, and was subject to them, . . . and advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men." (Luke II, 51–52). The rest is left to our imagination. How He was obedient, how he worked and prayed, we may easily picture to ourselves. That He should subject Himself to obedience when He Himself was the One who should be obeyed by all men, shows how completely He annihilated His own will. That He worked, taking upon Himself the yoke placed upon all men, in the garden of Paradise: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken" (Gen. III, 19), may be gathered from the fact that a human being, as now constituted, could not employ all his time in prayer. This conclusion is confirmed by the common opinion which asked: "Is not this the son of a carpenter?" (Mark VI, 3),—implying that He followed the vocation of His foster-father. That He prayed is doubted by no man, and that His prayer was the most perfect that had as yet ascended to the heavenly Father, is a corollary which naturally follows from His divine sonship. That Christ gave all this serious preparation to the work of redemption shows the importance He attached to it. And if the work of redemption is so important, what is the value of the soul, since it is commonly believed that He would have performed the work of redemption even if it had been for one soul only.

Resolve to put all your trust in God's mercy and all your hope in heavenly grace.

Conclusion: "What answer canst thou make, O wretched sinner, to those that reproach thee?—thou who hast so often offended God, and many times deserved hell? But Mine eye hath spared thee because thy soul was precious in My sight." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 13).

JUNE 12

WORK FOR THE SOUL

After thirty years' preparation for His mission, Christ entered upon His public life,—a period of three years devoted solely and entirely to saving souls. He went about teaching the people what was necessary for them to gain salvation. His manner of life and much of His doctrine was different from that of the rabbis, who had been heard with respect and reverence. He spoke as One having authority. "And they were astonished at His doctrine. For He was teaching them as one having power, and not as the Scribes." (Mark I, 22). In plain words He told them the value of their souls and the importance of gaining Heaven. "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. XVI, 26),—He asks them. And He tells His Apostles not to fear them "that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt. X, 28).

The Jews had drifted far from the teachings of their holy patriarchs and prophets, they had forgotten the words of the Royal Psalmist: "He that loveth iniquity hateth his own soul." (Ps. X, 6). The words of Tobias no longer made an impression on them: "They that commit sin and iniquity, are enemies to their own soul." (XII, 10): Hence when our Lord repeated these doctrines, it was like a revelation to them who had strayed so far away from the truth. To prove His authority in thus teaching He wrought many miracles, some of which are chronicled in Holy Writ, so that if they did not believe His words, they had at least to believe His

works. And this doctrine was spread by His Apostles and their successors to the ends of the world, reforming a carnal generation into spiritually minded children of God. This doctrine, like the leaven "which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened" (Matt. XIII, 33), permeated the whole of society, and in time, all men shall be reformed through it. Like the seed that grew into a tree, the Church has spread over the whole world, and the same truths expounded by Christ are being taught everywhere:—that we should take more care of the soul than of the body, for the body will last only for a short time, whereas the soul shall exist forever. Only one thing is necessary: Save your immortal soul. Unless we grasp this truth and live accordingly, we miss the one thing that counts in life, and if missed until death, the mistake is irreparable.

Resolve "in all things to look to the end, and how thou shalt be able to stand before a strict judge." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 24).

Conclusion: "If I love the spirit, I delight to think of spiritual things. For whatsoever things I love, of these I willingly speak and hear, and carry home with me the images of them." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 48). "Blessed is the man who for Thee, O Lord, lets go all things created, . . . that so he may be worthy to be among the choirs of angels." (*Ibid.*)

JUNE 13

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

In studying the public life of our Lord, we learn, from His example as well as from His words, what we must do to love and serve God in this life so as to be forever happy with Him in the life to come. The evangelists give us many de-

tails of Christ's conduct toward His heavenly Father and His fellowmen. We read how He often declared that it was His desire always to do the will of His heavenly Father. We see how He sacrificed every convenience and comfort in order to preach the word of God according to the will of His Father. We are edified and amazed at His spending whole nights in prayer, even after days filled with many occupations. So intent was Jesus on doing the will of God, that this constant task was as important to Him as His food, without which the body cannot exist. "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me, that I may perfect His work." Equally exemplary is His conduct toward His neighbor. The evangelists record not only the words which Jesus spoke, but also the works which He wrought. They tell how He went about the Holy Land, doing good to all whom Me met. His love and compassion for His fellow-men are everywhere in evidence. He relieved many of their physical ills and often also of their troubles of mind. His patience with His Apostles, so slow in comprehending His teachings, is seen in all His dealings with them. His eager love to impart the knowledge which would make man happy is disclosed on almost every page. His humility in serving His inferiors is strikingly shown when He stoops to wash the Apostles' feet before the Last Supper. He says: "I have given you an example, as I have done to you, so you also do." (John XII, 15). He obeyed lawful authority, although He was the source from which all authority comes. Rightly may He say in the words of *The Following of Christ*: "What great matter is it, if thou who art but dust and a mere nothing, submit thyself for God's sake to man, when I the Almighty, and the Most High, who created all things out of nothing, have, for thy sake, humbly subjected Myself to man. I became the most humble and abject of men, that thou mightest learn to overcome thy pride by My humility." With this sublime model

before us, how can we find an excuse for not following in the footsteps of our Divine Saviour?"

Resolution: "Let it be our chief study to meditate on the life of Jesus Christ." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. I, c. 1).

Conclusion: " 'Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity,' except loving God and serving Him alone. This is the highest wisdom: by despising the world to tend towards the kingdom of Heaven." (*Ibid.*)

JUNE 14

PASSION OF CHRIST

If there is anything which shows the great value that Christ set upon the soul, it is the seeming excess of His suffering for its redemption. No martyrdom, no tyrannical persecution can compare with the insult, abuse, and suffering that was heaped upon the meek and unoffending Jesus. He had foreseen this inglorious termination of His life upon earth from all eternity. He had time and again expressed to His heavenly Father His entire acquiescence in the eternal decrees for the redemption of mankind. He generously accepted these plans with all their concomitant pains and tortures. In the excess of His love, He did not deem them too severe and harrowing. And yet, when His Passion began in the Garden of Olives, when "the sight of all the pain and agony, all the abuse and insults He had to suffer in His approaching Passion and death, crowded and thronged as it were together, so as to behold them at a single glance (*Short Meditations,* p. 187), He suffered His whole Passion in anticipation, before the slightest blow had been inflicted upon Him." It is not surprising, then, that, as man, He should shrink from such suffering and that the conflict between the inferior faculties of His human nature and His holy will,

always united with the will of His heavenly Father, should force from His sensitive body the very life-blood, just as great mental conflicts wring from us drops of sweat.

Thus we can the better understand those words pressed to His sacred lips: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee: remove this chalice from Me; but not what I will, but what Thou wilt." (Mark, XIV, 36). "By all these pains and sufferings He obtained of God the Father good resolutions and protestations for your heart; and by the same means He obtained whatever is necessary to maintain, nourish, strengthen, and fulfill them. O precious resolution, being the daughter of such a mother as is the Passion of my Saviour! Oh, how tenderly ought my soul to cherish thee, since thou hast been so dear to my sweet Jesus." Knowing all these facts, are we perhaps asleep, like the Apostles, allowing the inferior faculties of our nature to overcome our will, and instead of the firm resolution of pleasing God and doing everything in our power to save our immortal souls, remain vacillating and lacking in determination to live for God alone and to save our souls?

Resolution: "Drink of the chalice of thy Lord lovingly, if thou desirest to be His friend and to have part with Him." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 12).

Conclusion: "Would to God thou wert worthy to suffer something for the name of Jesus! How great a glory would be laid up for thee, how great a joy would it be for all the saints of God, how great an edification to thy neighbor." (*Ibid.*)

JUNE 15

THE SCOURGING OF CHRIST

What a striking contrast is the scourging of Christ to the softness and effeminacy prevailing today? Rarely in the his-

tory of the world was there such luxury and easy living as now. That dreadful scourging of His sacred Body, so sensitive to pain, because it was a perfect body, is a standing protest against the current tendency to pamper the body and shield it from all pain and hardship. It is not true that man has degenerated to such a degree as to be unable to endure what is hard and trying to human nature. A modern author expresses this thought thus: "The war has shown us in the persons of our young soldiers that the human will has not lost a single bit of its pristine power to enable men to accomplish what might almost have seemed impossible. One of the heritages of the war should be the continuance of that fine use of the will which military discipline and war's demands so well brought into play. Men can do and stand ever so much more than they realize, and in the very doing and standing find a satisfaction that surpasses all the softer and pleasant feelings that come from mere comfort and lack of necessity for physical and psychical exertion." (Dr. James J. Walsh, *Health Through Will Power,* p. 16). In the same tenor another author says: "Be hard on yourself—that is to say do not be soft, but be strong. You must educate the body; you must be just and generous to it, but without weakness. If you allow yourself to ill-treat it, you will have to pay the penalty; and do not forget that softness is as much ill-treatment as over-hardness." Armel O'Connor, (*The Boyhood of a Priest,* p. 63). Unless the body be controlled, it will become an easy prey to vice, especially to impurity, which bears intellect and will away before it. It is not necessary to mistreat the body. Flagellation is never to be undertaken without the advice of a prudent spiritual director. The same may be said of long fasts. But the ordinary hardships which fall to the lot of every man, ought to be borne with courage and patience. Not every hardship may be escaped, some may not even be ameliorated. At such times the soul will assert its

sway over the body and with acts of submission, resignation, and penance will generously embrace the opportunity of following the example of Christ. With this thought in mind the author of *The Following of Christ* places the following words in the mouth of Christ: "Son, I came down from Heaven for thy salvation. I took upon Me thy miseries, not of necessity, but moved thereto by charity, that thou mightest learn patience, and bear without repining the miseries of this life." (Bk. III, c. 19).

Resolve to "be hard on yourself, not soft, but strong."

Conclusion: "O Jesus, how great thanks am I bound to return to Thee for having vouchsafed to show me and all the faithful a right and good way to Thy everlasting kingdom." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 18).

JUNE 16

THE CROWNING WITH THORNS

It is a pious belief which assigns the satisfaction of God's justice for the sins of pride committed by men as the motive of Christ's being crowned with thorns. Undoubtedly the reason for this thought is that, as pride is a sin especially of the intellect, the most appropriate satisfaction would be a suffering, physically excruciating, and yet not depriving man of the use of his reason and withal expressing or at least suggesting the spiritual cause for which it is suffered. Pride is that subtle process of the intellect which puts a man out of proportion with God and his fellowman. With blind conceit one's real or imaginary talents, learning or achievements are considered reason sufficient to raise the possessor above the ordinary run of men and make him more or less inde-

pendent of almighty God. This conclusion is so false because the vain thought of believing one's self sufficient to one's self has so little foundation. Everywhere and always there is evidence of our dependence upon God. Sickness, the sudden loss of reason, childishness, all stalk through the world and attest only too plainly man's entire dependence upon God. But the characteristic blindness of the proud prevents their seeing and understanding this truth so evident to the simple of heart.

That the educated should consider themselves above their fellowmen is more easily explained when we reflect that knowledge is power, and those who are possessed of knowledge, naturally forge ahead of their neighbor. The logic, however, is false. Their knowledge and consequent achievements are due to God-given talents which they neither deserved nor earned. And when viewed impartially, the man less gifted or accomplished, by using the faculties which he has faithfully, may accomplish proportionately more than his more gifted brother. Moreover, the seeming superiority of the one may be due in a great degree to circumstances over which he had no control. His environment, opportunities, and conditions of life may all have been favorable for the development of his gifts. Yet, were all these favorable conditions absent, and despite their absence a development of intellect attained beyond the run of ordinary men, cool, reflection will trace here also the work of God's providence, for all is from the hand of God. The Apostles' question may be aptly applied in this regard: "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. IV, 7). The suffering of the sacred Head of Christ wearing the crown of thorns is very appropriate then to teach us a lesson against intellectual pride.

Resolve to "let nothing appear great, nothing precious or

admirable, nothing worthy of esteem, nothing high, nothing truly praiseworthy or desirable, but what is eternal." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 4).

Conclusion: O God! I have not anything in which I may glory, but many reasons for humbling myself.

JUNE 17

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

When Christ shouldered the cross, He was in a very weakened condition. It was now almost noon, and He had tasted no food since the Last Supper; besides He had suffered the enervating agony in the garden of Olives, had been scourged and crowned with thorns. The tradition that He fell several times under the weight of the cross on His sorrowful way to Golgotha, can hardly be an exaggeration. The surprising thing is that He should rise each time with superhuman energy and drag Himself forward to the goal which was the aim of His life, namely, the horrible death on the cross. The only motive that could have sustained Him in this endeavor must have been the glory of His heavenly Father and an inexpressible love for the souls of men. "Jesus has many lovers of His heavenly Kingdom, but few that are willing to bear His cross." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 11). How many of us, weakened by many falls into sin, are ever ready and willing to rise again, and without discouragement to continue on the path of virtue and perfection? And yet, with the example of Jesus before us, how determined ought we to be to drag ourselves on, no matter how many and great the difficulties, to reach at last the goal of Christian perfection. "They that love Jesus for His

sake, and not for any comfort of their own, bless Him no less in tribulation and anguish of heart, than in the greatest consolation." (*The Following of Christ, ibid.*)

This task is not small, and yet it is required from those who would be faithful followers of Christ. No life is without its ups and downs. There are times when the pursuit of perfection is easy and other times when it is exceedingly irksome. To be faithful and loyal to Christ even when in no mood to go on, is a test of genuine love of the Saviour.

We know that Jesus might have redeemed the world in some easier manner had it been the will of the triune God, but just this manner was decreed in order that we might have an example in every contingency of life. The example is so helpful and inspiring that no one of good will has an excuse to grow despondent or to give up the effort necessary to arrive at the determined end. "Oh, how much is the pure love of Jesus able to do, when it is not mixed with any self-interest or self-love!" (*The Following of Christ, ibid.*) "He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me." (Matt. X, 38).

Resolve to remember "that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God." (Acts XIV, 21).

Conclusion: "O God! how deeply ought we to imprint this thy love in our memory!"

JUNE 18

THE MENTAL AGONY OF JESUS IN HIS PASSION

Many of the incidents of the Passion, without perhaps increasing Christ's physical suffering, nevertheless caused Him untold mental anguish. His meeting with His sorrowful Mother must have torn His sacred Heart with a paroxysm of grief. She, all undeserving of such suffering, because of

her sympathy with her beloved Son was enduring a pain as great as human nature could stand. As much as He would have liked to alleviate her suffering, He would not do so because of the merit as co-redemptrix she was thus gaining. And yet the fact of His Mother's intense suffering must have made His Sacred Heart bleed with compassion. The reluctance of Simon the Cyrenian to help Him carry the cross was another cause of mental trial for Him. Despite His innumerable acts of mercy to His fellowmen there was no one willing to help Him in His hour of need. The compassion of the daughters of Jerusalem could only fill His heart with grief, for their sorrow was mostly a sentimental sorrow and lacked the right motive namely, sorrow for the cause of His Passion,—sin. Hence His gentle remonstrance: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." Again the stripping Him of His garments must have been a source of much embarrassment and confusion to Him, the all pure and modest. These mental sufferings (without enlarging upon the sorrows caused by the thought that so few comparatively would profit by His Passion) and the desolation encountered by seemingly being abandoned by His Heavenly Father in this supreme moment, must have been as keenly painful to Him as any physical suffering. Few of the children of men are entirely spared periods of mental suffering in life. From time to time, in greater or less degree, all are called upon to taste this phase of Christ's Passion. How do we act in such moments? How often is there complaint, even from such as have been highly favored by God. How often are those who have been and are willing to bear great physical suffering for the sake of Christ, discouraged and almost despairing, when afflicted with mental trials. Yet, such sufferings are very meritorious and bring out the sincerity of our love for the suffering

Saviour. These trials are the alchemy which changes love of self into a true love of God. "As long as thou carriest about with thee a mortal body, thou wilt feel trouble and heaviness of heart. . . . At these times it is expedient for thee to fly to humble and exterior works, and to recreate thyself in good actions; to look for My coming and My heavenly visitation with assured hope; to bear with patience thy banishment and the aridity of thy heart, till thou be visited again by Me, and delivered from all anguish." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 51).

Resolve in time of mental suffering and distress to say: "O Father, worthy of all love, it is fitting that thy servant should at this hour suffer something for Thee." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 50).

Conclusion: "Lord, I am not worthy of Thy consolation, or any spiritual visitation; and therefore thou dealest justly with me when Thou leavest me poor and desolate." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 52).

JUNE 19

MISJUDGMENT IN THE PASSION

One of the elements of the sacred Passion that must have caused our Blessed Saviour distinct pain, was that in the very act of His greatest benevolence to man, He was accused, adjudged, and believed by many to be a criminal. He was judged by the high priests, the Jewish tribunal, and then by Pilate, the head of the Roman judicature, and no matter how unjustly, was pronounced guilty of death. On the face of it, innocent as He was, He was legally adjudged a criminal. How many this procedure may have deceived is not known to us; however, their number was undoubtedly no

small one. Those who approved of His execution were in a sense as much His executioners as were they who actually drove the nails through His sacred hands and feet. Hence His magnanimous words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke XXIII, 34).

But despite all this, what a culmination of the life of the God-man! A life of doing good to all whom He met, and to die as a supposed criminal! What a crushing blow this thought must have been to Jesus! What an example this aspect of Christ's Passion is for those who are misunderstood, their actions and intentions misinterpreted, and their whole lives misjudged. Christ in His goodness rarely allows such as these to go to their death without vindication. As may be often seen in the lives of the saints, in many instances, they labor under a cloud for a long time, but in the end the sincerity and integrity of their lives is made manifest by a loving Saviour, who will not allow them to suffer to the degree that He suffered in this regard. We too, may experience such misunderstanding of our actions or intentions, if not over long periods at least for a time. Then is the opportunity of imitating the good Master, who has gone on before as a model under like circumstances. We do not read that He defended Himself. He suffered mostly in silence, leaving all to the good pleasure of His Heavenly Father. There was no complaint, for complaining would have been a fault, and there can be no fault in Christ. Ever and always there was perfect resignation to the will of God and unbroken confidence in the goodness of God, who ordains only that which is for man's spiritual good. "Do not say, I cannot take these things from such a man, and things of this kind are not to be suffered by me, for he has done me a great injury, and he upbraids me with things I never thought on; . . . Such a thought is foolish which considers not the virtue of patience, nor by whom it shall be crowned; but rather

weighs the persons and the offences committed." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 19).

Resolution: "Cease to complain, considering My passion." (Bk. III, c. 19).

Conclusion: "Lord, because Thou wert patient in Thy life-time, in this chiefly fulfilling the commandment of Thy Father, it is fitting that I, a wretched sinner, should, according to Thy will, bear all with patience, and as long as Thou pleasest, support the burden of this corruptible life for my salvation." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 18).

JUNE 20

THE CRUCIFIXION

The excruciating pains our Lord suffered in the crucifixion are beyond description; not that they could be exaggerated, but rather because the sufferings of a God-man are beyond the possible knowledge and the experience of man. That perfect Body of Jesus, attuned to respond to the slightest perception of the senses, felt pain more keenly, than can the bodies of men coarsened by the sin of our first parents. The evangelists drew the picture of the crucifixion in merest outline, the details must be supplied by the meditation of the pious reader. An idea of the intensity of the pain and the mental agony of the Divine Sufferer must be supplied by the imagination and intellect of the one contemplating the picture. After delving, in as far as that is possible, into this abyss of misery and woe, there is nothing that we can better do for our spiritual profit, than to take the place of Magdalen at the foot of the Cross and there grieve over our sins and resolve again and again to amend our lives and to sin no more. As the warm blood trickles down the Cross,

we may desire with all our hearts that it flow over our souls and wash them clean from sin and supply the strength necessary to avoid sin in the future. Turning to His Blessed Mother, we may say:

"Make me feel as thou hast felt;
Make my soul to glow and melt
With the love of Christ my Lord."

With these sentiments we may be assured that "in the Cross is salvation, in the Cross is life, in the Cross is protection from our enemies. In the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the Cross is strength of mind, in the Cross is joy of spirit. In the Cross is the height of virtue; in the Cross is the perfection of sanctity." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 12). Here, at the foot of the Cross we ought to strive to realize the great benefit bestowed upon mankind by the atonement. Confiding in the satisfaction Christ made for sin, we may hope for forgiveness; trusting in the infinite love of the Saviour for the souls of men, we take courage in our resolve, broken so often before, that because of the infinite merit of Christ's death, at least now we will conquer sin and lead a life pleasing to His heavenly Father. "If thou lookest to thyself, thou canst of thyself do nothing of this. But if thou confidest in the Lord, strength will be given thee from Heaven, and the world and flesh shall be made subject to thy will." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 12).

Resolution: Excite in yourself a hatred of sin, an admiration of the goodness of God, trust in His mercy, and love of the crucified Saviour.

Conclusion: "O Jesus, we devoutly embrace that honored Cross whereon Thou didst love us even unto death. In that death we place all our confidence. Henceforth let us live only

for Thee." (*Goffine's Devout Instructions,* Stations of the Cross, Station XII).

JUNE 21

THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

In a seminary building in the Alpine region of Europe, a high altar was being planned, it was intended to place as central figure a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, because the characteristic devotion of the seminary was to Jesus' Divine Heart. The plan of the altar was drawn and submitted to the artist who had been chosen to carve the statue. Looking over the plan, he at once saw that a statue of the Sacred Heart was not in place here, but that there ought to be a large representation of the crucifixion. So enthusiastic did he become about the figure he already pictured in his mind's eye that the tears stood in his eyes as he spoke of the possibilities of this scene and how it would fit in with the plan of the altar. He was commissioned to submit his drawings. When they were presented it was found that he had embodied both ideas. The figure of the dying Saviour was shown with His Sacred Heart exposed to view. Thus there appears on this altar a work of art unique in conception and perhaps the only one of its kind in the world.

The idea is not inappropriate, for nowhere was the love of the Sacred Heart for the souls of men more strikingly manifested than on the Cross. "It is certain," says St. Francis de Sales, "that the Heart of Jesus beheld your heart from the tree of the Cross, and, by the love which He bore towards it, obtained for it all the good you shall ever have, and among the rest, your good resolutions. Yes, we may all say with the prophet Jeremias: 'O Lord, before I had a being

Thou didst behold me and call me by my name'; since the divine goodness did actually prepare for us all the general and particular means of salvation, and consequently our good resolutions." Whilst gazing upon the loving Heart of Jesus, pouring out the last drops of His life's Blood for us, what is more proper than that we should renew and fortify our resolutions to love Him in return, to be loyal to Him throughout our lives, no matter how filled with trials, tribulations, and afflictions they may be. Just in times of difficulty is our love tested and, if found true, lavishly rewarded. "The more the flesh is brought down by affliction, the more the spirit is strengthened by inward grace: and sometimes gains such strength through affection to tribulation and adversity by reason of loving to be conformable to the cross of Christ, as not to be willing to be without suffering and affliction; because such a one believes himself by so much the more acceptable to God, as he shall be able to bear more and greater things for Him." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 12).

Resolve to return the Sacred Heart of Jesus love for love.

Conclusion: "O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I implore that I may ever love Thee more and more."

JUNE 22

THE RESURRECTION

The fact of our Saviour's Resurrection is beyond cavil. There is hardly another fact in all history so well authenticated as this. No deception can have place here. The historical account of His death is too explicit to allow even for a moment the supposition that he was not really, but only

apparently dead. St. John narrates that when the soldiers, as was the custom, had broken the legs of the two men crucified with our Lord, "after they were come to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear opened His side, and immediately there came out blood and water." (XIX, 33–34). The testimony of the soldiers that He was dead is clear, and their precaution of excluding any possible doubt of it by piercing His sacred Heart with a spear settles the matter for any reasonable man.

Equally convincing is the account of His Resurrection. The historians of His life (we may call the evangelists historians, for their statements may be taken upon their authority with as much and even greater credence, even from a merely human standpoint, than the events related by their contemporaries), tell us in detail of His appearances after His death, first to one and then to another of His followers. Then again, to preclude all doubt, the incident of Thomas' absence and his consequent failure in seeing the Lord after the latter's death is narrated despite all the humiliation it must have caused Thomas, who had declared that he would not believe unless he were able to place his finger in the holes of Christ's sacred hands and feet and lay his hand in His side. Hence when Jesus again appeared, we are told how He said to Thomas: "Put in thy hand hither, and see my hands; and bring hither thy hand, and put it into my side." (John XXI, 27). And when Thomas, now ashamed of his unbelief, would not come forward, Jesus saith to him: Because thou hast seen Me, Thomas, thou hast believed: blessed are they who have not seen, and have believed." (*Ibid.*) Surely there can be no doubt in our minds after the testimony of these eye-witnesses.

These thoughts ought to excite you to spiritual joy. As Christ rose from the dead, so also shall we arise from the

dead. "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." (1 Cor. XV, 22). What a glorious heritage! "When this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? . . . But thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. XV, 54–56).

Resolve to "be steadfast and unmovable; always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (*Ibid.* V. 58).

Conclusion: "O Father, always to be honored, the hour is come which Thou didst foresee from all eternity, that Thy servant for a short time should be oppressed without, but should always live within to Thee, that he should be a little slighted and humbled, and should fall in the sight of men; that he should be severely afflicted with sufferings and diseases, that so he may rise again with Thee in the dawning of a new life, and be glorified in Heaven." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 50).

JUNE 23

THE ASCENSION

Forty days after His Resurrection, the Master led His disciples to Mt. Olivet, and "while they looked on, He was raised up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they were beholding Him going up to heaven, behold two men stood by them in white garments. Who also said: Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to heaven? This Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, as you have seen Him going up into heaven." (Acts I, 9–11). "And they adoring went back into Jerusalem with great joy."

(Luke XXIV, 52). The thought may arise: How could they rejoice now that they would no more see their beloved Master upon earth? The reason is because they now loved Jesus with an unselfish love. They rejoiced because of His joy, because of the blessed lot which would now be the possession of the sacred humanity for all eternity.

Jesus Christ now sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, almighty, and shall come to judge the living and the dead. The purest love of God is that of benevolence, which consists in wishing well to the beloved or in the joy we have at the beatitude of one we love, not for any advantage which may come to us through the good fortune of the beloved, but for the happiness of the loved one alone. Thus the disciples on this occasion were not thinking of themselves at all, only of the happiness of their Master, whom they wished all good and now rejoiced in His attainment of it. This love was a pure love of God, and as is always the case, rejoiced their souls, because they now possessed it. Happy the man who can purify his love of God to such a degree as to forget himself and his advantage! Higher love than this no man hath. And it is a foretaste on earth of what will be his eternal and blessed privilege in Heaven. If this occupation will make him happy in eternity naturally the same will make him happy here on earth. "Blessed is he who knoweth what it is to love Jesus, and to despise himself for the sake of Jesus. We must quit what we love for this Beloved, because Jesus will be loved alone above all things. . . . Thy Beloved is of such a nature that He will admit of no other; but will have thy heart to Himself, and sit there like a king on his throne." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 7). When we have arrived at that stage that we have given up affection for creatures except to love them only for Christ's sake, when we are able to forget self and put all our thought on Christ, then,

in accents of true love, unalloyed, we may exclaim with sincerity: "My God and My all!"

Resolution: "Let all things be loved for Jesus' sake, but Jesus for His own sake." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 8).

Conclusion: "Behold, my God and my all! What would I have more, and what more blessed thing can I desire? . . . My God and my all! Enough is said to him that understandeth; and to repeat it often it is delightful to the lover." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 34).

JUNE 24

FROM ETERNITY

From eternity God foresaw your being; from eternity God loved you, even though you were not yet existing; from eternity He planned your redemption through the Passion and death of His only begotten Son made man, despite the blight of original sin inherited from Adam and Eve, and your own personal sins. From eternity God saw how you would correspond with His grace, how you would resolve to serve Him both faithfully and loyally, and how you would persevere in this your holy resolution. In consequence of His love, He has prepared for you the graces and favors which He proffers you daily now that you exist. "Hence, speaking to you as well as to others by the prophet Jeremias, He says: 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee;' and amongst other things He caused you to make firm resolutions to serve Him." In the words of *The Following of Christ* we must confess: "All that we have in soul and body, all that we possess within or with-

out, by nature or grace, are Thy benefits, and commend the bounty, mercy, and goodness, of Thee, whom we have received all good." (Bk. III, c. 22). How jealously then ought we to treasure the good resolutions we have formed by the help of God's grace! How firmly we ought to keep these resolutions!

Some would have us believe that "resolutions are made to be broken." When we consider that these same resolutions occupied the omniscient God for all eternity, the utter fallacy of such a statement is readily seen. How can a resolution which God has planned for us to carry out, be of slight import? "O God! what resolutions are these, on which Thou hast thought and meditated from all eternity! Ah, how dear and precious they should be to us! What ought we not to suffer, rather than forget the least of them! Though the whole world should be destroyed in consequence, yet we must observe them faithfully; for the whole world is not worth one soul, and a soul is worth nothing without these resolutions."

"Nothing, therefore, ought to give so great joy to him that loveth Thee and knoweth Thy benefits, as the accomplishment of Thy will in himself, and the pleasure of Thy eternal dispensation." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 22).

Resolution: "Always wish and pray that the will of God be wholly fulfilled in thee." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 23).

Conclusion: "O dear resolutions! fair tree of life, which God with His own hand has planted in the midst of my heart, and which my Saviour desires to water with His blood to make thee fruitful: I will rather endure a thousand deaths than suffer any wind of prosperity to pluck thee up. No; neither vanity, delights, riches, nor tribulations, shall ever withdraw me from my design."

JUNE 25

PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance is defined as a particular grace which enables us to continue in the state of sanctifying grace till death. This grace is also called final perseverance and may in no way be earned or merited by us. It is a free gift of God. However, we can render ourselves disposed for it by another kind of perseverance, namely, a continuance in our good resolutions to serve God loyally. "O fair and holy resolutions! if I preserve you, you will preserve me; if you live in my soul, my soul will live in you. Live then, forever, O resolutions, which are eternal in the mercy of God; live eternally in me, and let me never forsake you!" This latter perseverance is possible only if the means necessary to maintain them are determinedly adopted and assiduously used. Frequent and earnest prayer is the first requisite. No man can stand long in his good resolutions without the help of God, and the help of God is enlisted by prayer. "Without Me, you can do nothing," our Blessed Saviour assures us in Holy Writ, and He will not ordinarily aid such as show no desire or eagerness for His divine assistance. Prayer not only manifests a wish for help but actually asks for it. Hence the catechism teaches that prayer is necessary for salvation, and without it, no one having the use of reason can be saved.

The Sacraments also are means to gain perseverance in our resolutions. Each Sacrament has its particular purpose, and in the seven Sacraments all the major needs of man's spiritual life are anticipated with helpful grace at the opportune time and with the appropriate assistance. Good works are another means. The more and the oftener we do good, the more steadfast we become in goodness. The more

settled we become in doing good, the more difficult it will be to dislodge us from this tendency. A constant effort to amend our faults which we discover by the examination of conscience may not be neglected. A continual striving to be better cannot remain without result. Progress will not be the only result, for the resolutions thus exercised will become more habitual and more firmly established. Difficult though it may seem, the retrenching of the occasions of sin will follow as a consequence. No one can consistently strive to become better without guarding against that which may lead him into error and sin.

Lastly, the counsels obtained through spiritual reading, meditations, and from our spiritual adviser will be generously followed with good will and determination. Those who are of good will are on the watch for just such aid and eager to avail themselves of it. When perseverance in our good resolutions is attained, then the grace of final perseverance will follow. For God never refuses this greatest of all gifts to those disposed to receive it.

Resolution: "Take courage, be valiant, as well in doing as in suffering things repugnant to nature." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 49).

Conclusion: "O Lord! Protect and defend the soul of Thy poor servant amidst so many dangers of this corrupt life, and direct him, in the company of Thy grace, through the way of peace, to the country of everlasting light. Amen." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 59).

JUNE 26

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

A young recruit may be sincerely loyal to his country and zealously patriotic, yet the government requires that he take

an oath of allegiance before he enters upon his duties. This procedure is undertaken not so much because the loyalty of the individual is questioned, but rather because of the deep impression this solemn protestation of fealty makes upon the soldier himself. Educators know that what is perceived through two senses makes a deeper impression upon the mind of the child than what is perceived by one sense only. Similarly, what is in the mind and heart will become more firm and vivid if expressed in words. The hearty protestation of our good resolutions will do much to solidify them and to keep them vividly before our minds with the result that they will be more apt to be faithfully kept. Therefore, "by way of recruiting your strength, make a thousand protestations that you will persevere in your resolutions; and as if you held your heart, soul, and will in your hands, dedicate, consecrate, sacrifice, and immolate them to God, protesting never to take them back, but leave them in the hand of His Divine Majesty, to follow on all occasions His holy ordinances. Pray to God to renovate you entirely, and to bless and strengthen this your protestation. Invoke the Blessed Virgin, your guardian angel, and your holy patron."

Experience teaches how easily we fall away from our first zeal, and we must do everything in our power to keep our enthusiasm up to the pitch we have reached when our faith was enlightened and our hearts were warmed with the love of our Blessed Master, in order to raise it higher, if possible, but never to let it fall below the highest mark to which we have attained. Aside from the grace of God, much of our success in this effort will depend upon ourselves. Whether we keep our zeal at white heat or gradually let it cool, will depend upon us. It is no small task to remain always constant in our effort, never to slacken in our endeavor, and only a determination that is never relaxed will bring success. For

this purpose our resolutions must be kept unbroken, for they are the props that keep us poised in our high position, and if these are knocked away, we fall and the process of rebuilding must be begun all over again. Hence the reason for a frequent and enthusiastic repetition of a pledge of allegiance to keep the resolutions we have formed, which will bolster up our constancy and fidelity, without which a truly devout life is impossible.

Resolution: Remember "how much the pure love of Jesus is able to do, when it is not mixed with any self-interest, or self-love." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 11).

Conclusion: "When Jesus is present, all is well, and nothing seems difficult; but when Jesus is absent, everything is hard." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 8). "He that embraceth Jesus shall stand firm forever." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 7).

JUNE 27

SENTIMENTS

The frequent protestation of our determination to serve God loyally, and to this purpose of keeping our resolutions, which we know, when faithfully followed, will keep us in this course, ought to fill the heart with a deep attachment for its blessed Master. Knowing that our good will, though frail and apt to waver, is very pleasing to God and elicits an effulgence of love for us from His tender Heart, a reciprocal love will well up in our hearts, filling us with both strength and consolation. Confidence, gratitude, and affection, all ought to be easy by-products of a fervent protestation of our intended fidelity in keeping the resolutions we have formed.

St. Francis de Sales says that the sentiments of the saints ought to be ours as a result of our sincere devotion to our

beloved Master. At these times the feelings expressed by the saints should naturally flow from our hearts, so that we may be able to say: "No, I am no longer my own; whether I live or whether I die, I am my Saviour's. I have no longer anything of me or mine; my me is Jesus and my mine is to be wholly His. O world! thou art always thyself, and I have hitherto always been myself; henceforth I will be myself no more." With St. Paul we are able to say: "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. II, 20). Sentiments such as these will awake in our hearts, if there is that sincerity which will not be turned aside by the allurements of the world, the devil, and the flesh.

To this degree of fervor we must bring our protestation of fidelity. And if a reason is sought for such ordering of our lives, it is ever and always the same, namely, the love of God for us. If He loves us, there is always the incentive for us to love Him. "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is charity." (1 John IV, 8). The more reason is there to love God, for we did nothing to make Him love us, we have nothing to attract His love. His love of us is a pure gift to us, and, "by this hath the charity of God appeared towards us, because God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we may live by Him" (*ibid.*, 9). Hence, "In this is charity: not as though we had loved God, but because He hath first loved us"(*ibid.*, 10). When the love of Jesus takes possession of our hearts, our protestation of fidelity and the consequent fulfillment of our resolutions is rendered easy, for "when Jesus is present, all is well, and nothing seems difficult; but when Jesus is absent, everything is hard." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. II, c. 8). Let the sentiments of love for Jesus and His Heavenly Father keep us in the determination of carrying out our good resolutions. "Let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed, and in truth." (1 John III, 18).

Resolution: "Above all things have charity, which is the bond of perfection." (Col. III, 14).

Conclusion: "Oh, when will this blessed and desirable hour come, when Thou shalt fill me with Thy presence, and become all in all to me?" (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 34).

JUNE 28

A MISCONCEPTION

After having read and meditated on these many and various means of attaining and following a devout life, the mind may be confused because of their multiplicity and variety, and there may be a tendency to conclude that a devout life is not intended for me. How can one in the world possibly follow all these various counsels and still be faithful to his secular duties, without the fulfilling of which he could not obtain the means of existence. I should have to give up all my other affairs in order to follow the devout life.

Such thoughts as these spring from a misconception of the manner and mode of application of the various means conducive to a devout life. "If they were all to be necessarily performed every day, they could indeed, constitute our whole occupation; but it is not requisite to perform them otherwise than in their proper place and time, as occasions may present themselves. How many civil laws and regulations there are which must be observed, but it is universally understood that they are to be executed on proper occasions, and no one imagines that they are to be put in force every day."

These counsels are like the tools of an artisan. In order

to execute his work expeditiously and to exercise the best craftsmanship, he uses now one tool, then another, with the result that he accomplishes the best work with the least labor, and the finished article is the most perfect that skill and labor can produce. Similarly, the person who undertakes to lead a devout life, from the many means at hand to accomplish this end, will now use this one, now another, in order consistently and unfailing to reach the goal for which he strives. Nor will such judicious use of these means interfere with one's secular vocation in life. "God will give you sufficient leisure and strength to perform all your other duties, even though He should make the sun stand still for you, as He did for Josue. We always do enough when God works with us." Rather than interfere with the secular duties of life, the following of a devout life will aid and make us more faithful in the performance of our other duties. The very idea of the devout life connotes fidelity to all our duties, whether they be spiritual or secular; for the neglect of duty is a fault, no matter what that duty may be, provided this neglect be not for a just cause, and a devout life intends the banishment of all faults as far as it is possible. The spiritual will not conflict with the secular, as long as there is order and good will in our lives. Be not deluded, then, by a seeming objection, but rather study how to combine the spiritual with the temporal, in which combination is the very secret of a devout life.

Resolution: "Refer, therefore, all things principally to Me, for it is I who have given thee all." (*The Following of Christ,* Bk. III, c. 9).

Conclusion: "My son, I must be thy chief and last end, if thou desirest to be truly happy. By this intention shall thy intention be purified, which too often is wrongly bent upon thyself and things created." (*Ibid.*)

JUNE 29

PROFESSION OF PIETY

"Make an open profession, not of being devout, but of desiring to become devout." This intention, expressed by word or action, where it is necessary or seemly that it should be disclosed, will solidify your determination to live devoutly and besides remove many difficulties caused by others which would otherwise be placed in your path. "The philosophers professed themselves philosophers, that they might be suffered to live like philosophers; so we must profess ourselves as being desirous of devotion, that we may be suffered to live devoutly." If rightful objection is raised to your manner of life in your pursuit of devotion, examine without prejudice the reasons for the objection, and if they are found to be reasonable, strive to order your life in such manner that the objection can no longer be urged. Should the reasons for the objection, however, be unjustified, as is often the case when coming from those of less zeal, or from such as lead indifferent spiritual lives, answer mildly, that to live devoutly, your weakness being so great, you stand in more need of help and assistance than others. "Be not ashamed to practice those necessary actions which conduct the soul to the love of God. Acknowledge frankly that you would rather die than commit a mortal sin; that you are resolved to frequent the sacraments, and to follow the counsels of your director, though sometimes it may not be necessary to name him; for this candid profession of our desire to serve God and of consecrating ourselves entirely to His love, is very acceptable to His Divine Majesty, who commands us not to be ashamed either of Him or of His Cross." Our Blessed Lord

Himself says: "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, I shall also confess him before My Father who is in heaven." Although it would save us from the temptation of vain glory were we able to perform our actions of piety in secret, yet Jesus says: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Mat. V, 16). St. Gregory explains that our good works should be done as though no one saw them, even though they be quite public. Our intention must always be to please God and not to draw admiration for ourselves. Thus it is explained how at one time Holy Writ advises that we do our works in secret and at another, that we should perform them in public. What is meant is, that when possible, our good works should be known to God alone, when the glory of God does not counsel their disclosure; however, when required in public the intention in performing them must always be the honor and glory of God, and never our own glory.

Resolve openly and fearlessly to perform the necessary actions of a devout life in the service of God.

Conclusion: O most gracious and merciful God, I desire, purpose and am irrevocably resolved to serve and love Thee now and forever; and to this end, I give and consecrate to Thee my soul with all its powers, my heart with all its affections, and my body with all its senses.

JUNE 30

THE MOTIVE

In our times the all-pervading motive for a devout life ought to be the presence in our midst of the august Person of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. In our churches, even in the lowliest, our Saviour is present in the Blessed Sacrament, His

heart beating with an intense love and an eager desire to impart the benefits of that love to the children of men. On the Cross Jesus demonstrated that love as a boon for all humanity; in the tabernacle He lavishes it upon the humble believer. On the Cross He allowed His Sacred Heart to be opened by a spear, so that His love might flow out to the whole world; in the tabernacle His Sacred Heart directs His love to each one coming to Him. On the Cross He drew all men to Himself by virtue of His merits; in the tabernacle He draws the faithful to Himself by means of His special graces. His whole public life on earth was spent going about doing good. His Eucharistic life is hidden and quiet, but none the less occupied in doing good for those who believe in Him. As God He is everywhere, as Jesus in the sacrament of the Eucharist He limits Himself to the narrow confines of the tabernacle. As God, He bestows His generous benefits to all men through His Divine Providence; in the tabernacle He distributes His gracious favors especially on those who are members of the particular church in which He dwells and to all in that immediate neighborhood. From all eternity His thought has been engaged with every individual of the human race, in the tabernacle of your parish church or in the church where you visit Him in the Blessed Sacrament, His thought is particularly centered on you. The love of the Sacred Heart in the Blessed Sacrament is occupied with you individually. That love is unique, disinterested, benevolent, unabated, untiring. Its constant plea is: "Child, give Me thy heart"; not as though compliance could give Him any benefit, but only because yielding to His wish will benefit you.

Convinced of this love of Jesus for us in particular, who will refrain from loving Him in return? To love God sincerely is nothing other than to lead a devout life. Consistency requires a life conformable to the love we owe our dearest

Friend and Benefactor. In the light of these facts, consider the spiritual graces God has bestowed upon you. "You are a child of the Catholic Church; God has taught you to know Him even from your childhood. . . . And were not all these past years given you as so many favorable opportunities of working out your salvation?" If you have not responded faithfully heretofore, it is not too late to start now.

Resolve: "To admire the goodness of God. O how good is my God to me! O how good indeed! How rich is Thy Heart, O Lord, in mercy, and liberal in clemency!"

Conclusion: "Turning myself to Thee, my dear Jesus! King of eternal glory and happiness! I embrace Thee with all the powers of my soul! I adore Thee with my whole heart, and choose Thee now and forever for my King." With inviolable fidelity, I will live a devout life, return Thee love for love, and seek to please Thee in life and in death. Amen.

JULY 1

THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST

Solomon at the height of his glory, when he had tasted all the sweets of life, being possessed of wisdom beyond all that were before him in Jerusalem, enjoying every material good that his heart could desire, mighty in his ownership of wealth and possessions, revered as a ruler over subject and vassal, in short, while in a position to gratify his every whim and fancy, declared time and again that all is vanity. In itself wisdom is vain, the good things of this world are vain, wealth is vain, power is vain,—"Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity." Yet these are the things that men prize, men seek, from which they expect pleasure, happiness, and satisfaction. How then can Solomon call them vain?

What is the one thing that can satisfy the craving of man's heart for happiness? It is the love and service of God. Only when wisdom, pleasure, wealth, and position are co-related to this end in life, can they give complete happiness, in as far as that is possible here on earth. When taken out of this relationship they are sweet only to the palate but have a bitter aftermath.

The love and service of God is best accomplished by the imitation of the life of Christ. "Let it then be our chief study to meditate on the life of Christ. The doctrine of Christ surpasseth all the doctrines of the saints; and whosoever hath the spirit will find herein a hidden manna. But it happeneth that many, by frequent hearing of the gospel, are very little affected; because they have not the spirit of Christ. But he who would fully and feelingly understand the words of Christ, must study to make his whole life conformable to that of Christ." We must adopt the thought of Christ, imitate His conduct, and follow His attitude towards the things of the earth. He did not condemn all earthly things indiscriminately. He teaches us to use the things of this world not as an end, but rather as a means to our real end. Hence we have saints among the rich and saints among the poor. The former made their earthly possessions a means to sanctity and the latter made the absence of worldly goods the means to the same end. The possessors of power may use it to sanctify themselves, and those without any earthly power use this very circumstance for their sanctification. The wise gain their goal through wisdom, the unlearned gain the same goal by their simplicity. That which Solomon calls vain is therefore good as it comes from the hand of God, and vain only when not properly used and adapted to the right purpose and end of man's existence. Would you learn the proper attitude toward the creatures of earth? Then study the life and doctrine of Christ.

Resolve "to withdraw thy heart from the love of visible things, and turn thyself to things invisible."

Conclusion: O God, from whom all good things proceed, grant to Thy supplicants that by Thy inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by Thy direction perform them. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. (*Missal,* 5th Sunday after Easter.)

JULY 2

WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

Here again Solomon is the classic example of wisdom which, as we know, was a special gift from God to him. His knowledge and wisdom were renowned throughout the then known world. Holy Writ itself praises him in his choice of wisdom above all the gifts he might have asked of God. We should, therefore, think that wisdom and knowledge were much to be sought for and greatly to be desired. And yet Solomon says: "I passed further to behold wisdom, and errors, and folly. . . . And I saw that wisdom excelled folly, as much as light differeth from darkness: . . . and I learned that they were to die both alike. And I said in my heart: If the death of the fool and mine shall be one, what doth it avail me, that I have applied myself more to the study of wisdom? And speaking with my own mind, I perceived that this also was vanity." (Eccles. LI, 12 sq.) Why did Solomon speak thus? The reason is because: "There are many things the knowledge of which is of little or no profit to the soul. And he is very unwise who attends to other things than what may serve to his salvation. . . . The more and better thou knowest, the more heavy will be thy judgment, unless thy life be also more holy." The gist of the matter is that knowledge and wisdom, unless they are made subservient to the

gaining of our true aim in life, are a heavy responsibility fraught with much danger. The possessor of these qualities is apt to be proud, haughty, and forgetful of his dependence on God. Solomon is an example of what wisdom is capable of when not co-ordinated with the purpose of using it for the honor and glory of God and the salvation of one's soul. In his case it suggested and made possible the means of seeking only oneself and one's own pleasure. He confesses: "Whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not; and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure, and in delighting itself in the things which I had prepared: and esteemed this my portion to make use of my own labor. And when I turned myself to all the works that my hands had wrought, and to the labors wherein I had labored in vain, I saw in all things vanity, and vexation of mind, and that nothing was lasting under the sun." Hence if you have knowledge, "be not therefore puffed up with any art or science; but rather fear on account of the knowledge which is given to you. If it seems to you that you know many things, and understand them well enough, know at the same time that there are many other things of which you are ignorant. Be not high-minded but rather acknowledge your ignorance." If on the other hand, convinced of your ignorance, you wish to learn and to know anything to the purpose of glorifying God and benefiting your soul, "love to be unknown and esteemed as nothing. This is the highest and most profitable lesson, truly to know and despise ourselves."

Resolve to learn of Christ, for He is meek and humble of heart.

Conclusion: "Oh God, who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that we may be truly wise in the same spirit, and ever rejoice in His consolation, through Jesus Christ our Lord." (*Missal,* Feast of Pentecost.)

JULY 3

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH

Important as it is to know God and the things concerning God, even more important is it to live in accordance with this knowledge. There are those who are very punctilious in learning the truths concerning God, but not at all zealous in following the practical rules of life resulting from these truths, "because many make it their study more to know than to live well." The quest of divine truth must be made with the thought to learn the better how to honor and serve God and to gain the salvation of our souls, for "it is a great folly for us to neglect things profitable and necessary, and willingly to busy ourselves about those things which are curious and hurtful." "Rather than follow preacher after preacher in the search of curious knowledge, rather than occupy our minds with useless speculations concerning the things of God, rather than read book upon book concerning Christian doctrine, it were better to gain a knowledge of the fundamental truths and regulate our lives upon them." Oh! if men would use as much diligence in rooting out vices and planting virtues, as they do in proposing questions, there would not be so great evils committed, nor scandals among the people. Nor will those, who are more concerned about living according to the fundamental truths, be lacking in the additional knowledge necessary for them to gain their salvation, because "the more a man is united within himself, and interiorly simple, the more and higher things does he understand without labor; because he receives the light of understanding from above. Rather than to delve into intricacies of the knowledge of God, which is the task rather of our

teachers than ours, it must be our business to strive to overcome ourselves, and daily to gain strength over ourselves, and to grow better and better." Moreover, a knowledge which will benefit us more than a curious searching into the truths of God is a humble knowledge of ourselves. "The humble knowledge of yourself is a surer way to God than the deepest search after science." The proverb that "knowledge is power" is true in the spiritual sense only when knowledge is employed for the greater honor and glory of God and the saving of souls.

The truly wise will, therefore, strive to gain a benefit from all they may learn about God and His works. They will not merely store up a knowledge in their minds to glory in or to display upon occasion for their self glorification. Their knowledge will rather be a practical one, bringing them always closer and closer to the God of their love.

Resolve to be learned in the sense of doing the will of God and renouncing your own will for His sake.

Conclusion: "Grant, O Lord, that we may have a perpetual fear and love of Thy Holy Name, for thou never ceasest to direct and govern, by Thy grace, those whom Thou instructest in the solidity of Thy love." (*Missal,* 2nd Sunday after Pentecost.)

JULY 4

PRUDENCE

It is easy to fly with the wind, easy to swim with the current, but to make a stand and at times to drive counter to the wind or current is a difficult task. So, too, it is an easy matter to do and say and think what the multitude does around us, but to make a stand and to say, do and think what

is contrary to what others do is truly a man's task. For example, "Such is our weakness, that we often more readily believe and speak of another that which is evil, than that which is good." Hence, there is much detraction and uncharitable talk in the world. Unless we are prudent and speak not every thought that comes to our minds, and repeat not every tale that comes to our ears, we shall swell the flood of this universal evil.

A good man will marshal his thoughts before his conscience before he utters them and if they be not well founded and useful for communication, he will not utter them at all. He will not believe every man's report, nor presently tell others the things he has heard or believes. "We must not be easy in giving credit to every word or suggestion; but carefully weigh the matter according to God. . . . Perfect men do not easily give credit to every report; because they know man's weakness, which is very prone to evil, and very subject to fail in words." What is true of our words is true of our actions. The same prudence, caution and deliberation are necessary to act wisely as well as to speak wisely. We dare not act on the impulse of the moment but must consider what the consequences of our action will be for ourselves as well as for others. "It is great wisdom not to be rash in our doings." It is well ever to look to God and to see whether our actions meet with His approval. Once assured of the stamp of His approval we may go ahead fearlessly, with the knowledge that we shall not need to regret what we have done.

Lest we maintain too obstinately our own opinion, we should "consult with a wise and conscientious man, and seek rather to be instructed by one who is better, than to follow our own inventions." Just as a man in good health is less liable to contract diseases, so the man who leads a good life is less likely to fall into errors, which are so prevalent amongst those less conscientious. "A good life makes a man

wise according to God, and expert in many things. The more humble a man is in himself, and more subject to God, the more wise he will be in all things, and the more at peace." Prudence therefore requires that we place before the scrutiny of our conscience every thought, word and action before we send it forth into the world. Happy the man who has learned such holy prudence!

Resolve to be wise as a serpent and as simple as a dove. (Matt. X, 16).

Conclusion: "Grant, we beseech Thee, O Lord, at all times, the spirit of thinking and doing what is right, that we, who cannot exist without Thee, may be able to live according to Thy will." (*Missal,* 8th Sunday after Pentecost.)

JULY 5

SPIRITUAL READING, CHOICE OF BOOKS

The Holy Bible is the source from which all spiritual writers must draw in writing about God and man's immortal soul. True, some truths contained in Tradition are not expressly mentioned in the Bible, and again other truths known only by Tradition are now committed to books; yet the written word of God as inspired and revealed by God is in the Bible alone. The best book for spiritual reading is the Bible, especially the New Testament. Holy Writ is God's revelation of the truth. Accordingly, 'All Holy Scripture ought to be read with that spirit with which it was made," namely, for the revelation of the truth. To read merely for entertainment or to gain a knowledge of historical facts, will gratify our curiosity, but will be of little spiritual profit. "If you will receive profit, read with humility, simplicity, and faith." As

the New Testament was written especially for those who lived after our Blessed Saviour, the reading of this portion of the Bible will yield the most fruit for the devout reader. However, the writings of other spiritual writers ought not to be entirely neglected, nor should we be too much influenced by the reputation of the author. "We ought as willingly to read devout and simple books as those that are high and profound. Let not the authority of the writer offend you, whether he was of little or great learning; but let the love of pure truth lead you to read. Inquire not who said this, but attend to what is said." Any spiritual book may be of advantage to the reader if read in the light of a letter from God to the reader. Preferably the writings of those men and women who are declared saints by the Church should be perused; however, much good may be obtained also from modern writers on spiritual subjects, especially those who take the conditions and trend of the present time into due consideration. Like St. Francis de Sales, they may say of their treatises: "Although the doctrine is the same, the mode of treating it differs according to the several methods in which they are composed. I neither can or will, nor indeed ought to write anything . . . upon this subject different from that which has already been written by our predecessors. The flowers which I present to you are the same; but the nosegay which I have made of them differs from theirs, being made up in different order and method." We are advised to inquire willingly into and to hear with silence the words of the saints, and to be pleased with parables of the ancients; for they are not spoken without cause."

Resolve frequently to read Holy Scripture, the writings of the saints, and the treatises composed by men versed in spiritual science.

Conclusion: "Grant, we beseech Thee, O Lord, in Thy

heavenly mercy, the prayers of thy suppliant people, that they may both see what they ought to do, and be enabled to do what they see." (*Missal,* 1st Sunday after Epiphany.)

JULY 6

PEACE OF MIND

Order makes for peace, quiet, smoothness, and serenity. Wherever we find peace, we will also find everything regulated according to established rules. Quiet is the result of the consciousness that all is following certain laws which are calculated to insure safety, security, and stability, and consequently the mind rests without anxiety. When the cogs of one wheel fit nicely into those of another according to a well-devised plan, we have smoothness in the operating of an engine. Winds and the storm while they rage, seem to know no law, but after they have passed, the landscape again takes on a quiet serenity, which, in contrast to what had immediately preceded, is most striking. Man has within him passions which, when regulated by rules and laws, are his ally for good, but if they are allowed to break their bonds, to run without careful guidance and restraint, the peace of his mind and conscience is disturbed, and he lives in remorse and unrest.

The spiritual man must control his passions and keep them in subjection by following certain rules and regulations, namely, the commandments of God. "It is by resisting our passions that we are to find true peace of heart, and not by being slaves to them." The passions incline to sensible things, which are either forbidden or to be used in a well regulated manner, without excess and controlled by right reason. "Whenever a man desires anything inordinately, he is pres-

ently disquieted within himself." To be truly spiritual, he must seek to withdraw himself from sensible delights and find his pleasure in that which is spiritual or that leads to or fosters the spiritual. "He that is weak in spirit, and in a manner yet carnal and inclined to sensible things, can hardly withdraw himself wholly from earthly desires. And therefore he is often sad, when he withdraws himself from them; and is easily moved to anger if anyone thwarts him. And if he has pursued his inclinations, he is presently tormented with the guilt of his conscience; because he has followed his passions, which help him not at all towards the peace he sought for." Only the man who strives to fulfill his destiny, *viz.*, to serve God, and who holds his passions subservient to this purpose, can enjoy genuine peace of mind. Others may seem to enjoy such peace, but it is merely a semblance. For these every now and then, like the hydra, a head is thrust forth first that of remorse, then that of doubt, or again that of fear,—all so many disturbers of peace and equanimity. For the righteous man these are all dispatched by his faith and confidence in the love and mercy of God.

Resolve to be always obedient to the voice of conscience, for peace of mind is in obedience to conscience.

Conclusion: "Be appeased, O Lord, we beseech Thee, and grant to Thy faithful pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from their offences, and serve Thee with a secure mind." (*Missal,* 20th Sunday after Pentecost).

JULY 7

DIFFIDENCE

It is not only dangerous for one's spiritual life, but also discloses an utter lack of knowledge of self to place much trust in oneself. There are those who think that they must accom-

plish everything by their own efforts, little considering how weak they are. They would seem to be independent of God, or at least not to need Him until they have their backs to the wall. What they cannot do personally they seek to attain through the aid of their fellowmen, but God's aid is sought only when all else has failed. They trust first of all and unhesitatingly in their own perspicuity. Their knowledge is for them all-sufficient to carry them through life. To knowledge is joined physical strength, which has never deserted them when needed. Added to this is wealth, which seems to buy anything. How foolhardy! In one moment all these things can be taken away. Knowledge is powerful only when subservient to the will of God. Physical strength is fickle and may be lost by one little accident. Riches is even more precarious, and is often dissipated as the fog before the wind. Only one thing counts in the possession of all these gifts—for they are gifts of God and dependent upon Him—that is the conviction that their continuance depends upon God. It is useless to glory in them as if they came from our own efforts, it is foolish to think ourselves better than others because of their possession, as if we were the author of them.

In everything that we do or strive for we must be ever mindful of our dependence upon God. No matter what our qualifications may be to accomplish a task, there are so many contingencies that it is utterly impossible to depend upon ourselves alone or even upon the help of our neighbor for success, without taking God into consideration. For a Christian this truth ought to be self-evident. And yet there are many who trust entirely in themselves, seemingly having no need of God. As a result, though accomplishing many praiseworthy works in life, they have little or no merit for their immortal souls. Almighty God seconds their efforts, but it is merely concurrence on His part, which He gives to every action because of His Divine Providence, but as to the

action being pleasing to Him, that is another consideration. "The judgments of God are different than the judgments of men; and often that which pleases man displeases God."

It is well to deduce from these truths that, no matter how well endowed a man may be with qualities of body, mind, and heart, he is wise only if he trusts not in these, but in the Author and Preserver of them.

Resolve to place all your trust in God and but little in yourself.

Conclusion: "May Thy grace, O Lord, ever precede and follow us, and make us ever intent upon good works." (*Missal,* 16th Sunday after Pentecost).

JULY 8

FAMILIARITY

There are those who, as it were, carry their hearts on their sleeves. They will speak of their spiritual affairs and experiences to any one who will give them a hearing. Although this course of action may denote an innocent simplicity and bespeak candor, yet the affairs of the soul are so sacred and reverend as to counsel silence about them or at least the disclosure of them only to a trusted few. "Discover not thy heart to every one, but treat of thy affairs with a man that is wise and feareth God." (Eccl. VIII, 22). To treat with the young and frivolous of such things is to expose them to the danger of being contemned and treated lightly. The young as a rule have neither the taste nor mentality to relish or to respect what to us is sacred. Strangers will not understand us, for, not knowing us well, they will not know how to take our disclosures, they will not be able to discern whether what we say proceeds from sincerity or from a spirit of boastfulness. To gain the ear of the rich or the great may flatter us,

but usually will do us no good and may do a great deal of harm. Better by far to keep these affairs closed up in our hearts, then there will be no danger of being puffed up with pride through them, nor of being misunderstood, nor of having the little good we think we possess, slip away from us. True, there may at times be occasions when the disclosure of the spiritual affairs of our soul may redound to spiritual good. However, this will be the case only when you "associate with the humble and simple, with the devout and virtuous, and treat of those things which may be to edification." The better way is to "desire to be familiar only with God and His angels, and fly the acquaintance of men." We read in Holy Scripture that when Christ told His Blessed Mother that He must be about His Father's business, which she did not understand, far from discussing it with St. Joseph or her friends, she "kept all these words in her heart." Thus, too, the devout person keeps divine inspirations and spiritual experiences to himself, even if at times he does not understand them, and seeks above all and in the first place a solution from God. If advice or counsel is imperative, then consultation with some spiritual person is proper, for God sometimes communicates with us through a human agency. However, then, one is His mouth-piece, not many.

Resolution: Have charity for all; but familiarity is not expedient.

Conclusion: O God, Thou art the faithful friend, and he who hath found Thee, hath found a treasure. Be Thou my friend.

JULY 9

BEING SUBJECT TO OTHERS

In the spiritual life it is easier, safer, and more meritorious to be subject, than to rule. To do the will of a superior

who has a lawful place of authority, is to do the will of God. A subject can easily recognize the will of God in the command of his superior. While acting under obedience the desire of doing something else more pleasing to God, is simply an illusion. When the commanded work is performed, if successful, we know it is because of the blessing of God on its performance; if unsuccessful, provided we have done our part, we may console ourselves with the thought that God did not will its success and is more pleased with our obedience than He would have been with the successful issue of the work. The wife must be obedient to her husband, children to their parents and teachers, religious to their superiors, and priests to their bishops. To submit ourselves with our whole heart for God's sake is to find freedom of mind and pleasure in our spiritual affairs. Go where we will, unless we are willing to obey lawful superiors, there can be no genuine peace. A person desires to be master of himself or to have as superior one who is of like mind with himself. However, for God's sake it is necessary to give up one's desires and likes and to be submissive to others. When obedience costs a sacrifice of self-will, it is the more meritorious. No one is so wise as to be able of himself, always to detect the will of God and to do that which is most pleasing to Him. To obey a lawful superior gives us the assurance of doing just that which is most pleasing to God. "It may also happen that each one's thought may be good; but to refuse to yield to others when reason or a just cause requires it, is a sign of pride and wilfulness." Much better by far to submit to others, "although your opinion be good, yet if for God's sake you leave it to follow that of another, it will be more profitable for you." How wise are they who have no will of their own, but seek always to do the will of a superior which is the expressed will of God.

Resolve to follow the example of our Lord who was sub-

ject to His parents, although they were far inferior to Him.

Conclusion: "Almighty and eternal God, direct our actions so as to be pleasing to Thee, that in the name of Thy beloved Son, we may deserve to abound in good works." (*Missal,* Sunday after Christmas).

JULY 10

SUPERFLUOUS WORDS

It is a difficult task for a man who talks much to avoid offending God by his speech. It is but natural that man, being a social being, should seek communication with others. To indulge this propensity is not only lawful, but even virtuous, when done within certain bounds. Nevertheless, excesses may spoil an otherwise innocent indulgence, such as going beyond the limits prescribed by reason as to the amount of time spent in such talk, or as to the themes and the restraint that must be exercised in social intercourse. When no thought is given to these limitations, conversation easily lends itself to gossip, self-praise, flattery, and detraction. The Apostle St. James expresses this truth in the words: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." (II, 2). And he warns: "If any man thinks himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (I, 26). The underlying reason for the desire to communicate with others in a well intentioned person is to seek comfort for himself and to relieve his heart wearied by various thoughts. "But alas! it is often in vain and to no purpose; for this outward consolation is no small hindrance to interior and divine comfort. . . . If it be lawful and expedient to speak, speak those things which may edify." Not all communication is to be avoided by the man living in

the world, but restraint must be exercised, and the subjects of conversation as far as possible should be those that will edify. "Devout conferences concerning spiritual things help very much to spiritual progress, especially where persons of the same mind and spirit are associated together in God."

Resolution: "Watch and pray, that your time may not pass away without fruit."

Conclusion: "The Lord hath given me a tongue for my reward, and with it I will praise Him."

JULY 11

ACQUIRING PEACE

To acquire peace of soul, it is necessary always to disengage our minds more and more from the things of the world and to center them upon God.

How is that possible for people living in the world? If the man in the world is concerned only about those things which are necessary for him, for his own sustenance and for those dependent upon him, for worldly amusement and joy that is congruous with his state of life and needful for genuine recreation for himself and for those to whom he is bound, if he go not to excess in what is lawful, and especially if he connect his present necessities with an abiding thought of God, he will enjoy much peace of soul. The lack of such peace is usually the result of a forgetfulness of God, due to being absorbed in concerns that are not properly our own, or that are unnecessary. "We might have much peace, if we would not busy ourselves in the sayings and doings of others and in things which belong not to us."

The more the devout soul seeks to be recollected inwardly,

while engaged in the necessary concerns of life, the greater proportionately will be the peace he enjoys. It is impossible to detach oneself from the duties of life. These require a certain amount of attention which is indispensable. To acquire a habit of connecting this attention with the thought of God by a good intention, with the determination to rely on God's aid even in our smallest concerns, with the desire to further God's interest in all that we do, and with the consciousness of God's continuous presence, will insure a peace of soul that will remain with us in every occupation of life.

Resolve to "be not too much taken up with your own passions nor too solicitous about transitory things."

Conclusion: "Give peace, O Lord, to those who patiently wait for Thee, that thy prophets may be found faithful: and hear the prayers of Thy servants . . . and of Thy people Israel." (Ecclus. XXXVI, 18).

JULY 12

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

In the spiritual life it is necessary to make continual progress. There can be no stand-still. As soon as effort ceases there will be a slipping back. Hence Holy Writ calls life a battle, for man must be continually fighting. The reason why this is the case, is because the passions within him are ever striving to gain the mastery in his soul. With little interruption they attack the soul, and man must fight back or be dominated by them.

Now, if we make little or no progress in spiritual life, it is because seldom "do we perfectly overcome so much as one vice, nor are we earnestly bent upon our daily progress; and therefore we remain cold and tepid." The admonition of

Christ, "daily to take up our cross and follow Him," is a spur for unremitting effort to become better. "Our fervor and progress ought every day to be greater; but now it is esteemed a great matter if a man can retain some part of his first fervor."

The grace of God will assist us in our determined resolution to serve Him more perfectly. "If we rooted out one vice every year, we would soon become perfect." The difficulty is that after a fervent start many relapse into a state of self-complacency or even indifference, which paralyses the effort necessary to resist the passions consistently and to progress in virtue. Others of us, "when we meet with any small adversity, are too quickly dejected, and turn away to seek after human consolation. If we strove like valiant men to stand in the battle, doubtless we should see that our Lord would help us from heaven. For he is ready to help them that fight and trust to his grace."

Resolve daily to fight the good fight against your passions and do not weary in the pursuit of virtue.

Conclusion: "Oh, if thou wert sensible how much peace thou shouldst procure to thyself, and how much joy to others, by behaving thyself well, thou wouldst be more solicitous for thy spiritual progress."

JULY 13

ADVANTAGES OF ADVERSITY

A religious man is perhaps never nearer to God than when he is humiliated, slandered or calumniated; for it is then that he sees more vividly the vanity of reputation and the fickleness of public opinion and realizes that his true worth is only that at which God holds him. How often is he mis-

understood, misinterpreted, or misrepresented frequently at the very time when he intends well. Such adversity is well calculated to bring him nearer to his God, in whom he recognizes his one true Friend, who understands all his motives, sees his good intentions, and to whom he cannot be misrepresented. "Then we better run to God, our inward witness, when outwardly we are despised by men and little credit is given to us."

A friend in need is a friend indeed. A friendship which is so ideal as that of Christ for our souls is best appreciated, and the comfort of abandoning ourselves entirely to Him as the source of our greatest consolation is most experienced when all the world seems to turn against us.

In adversities our Blessed Saviour never fails the soul. He may delay His comfort for a while, but for that very reason it is all the sweeter when, in His own good time, He bestows it upon the sufferer. When thus afflicted, the religious man laments, "he sighs, he prays by reason of the miseries which he suffers. Then he is weary of living longer, and wishes death to come, that he may be 'dissolved and be with Christ.' "

Resolve to "establish yourself in such a manner in God, as to have no need of seeking many comforts from men."

Conclusion: "I will be glad and rejoice in Thy mercy. For Thou hast regarded my humility, Thou hast saved my soul out of distress." (Ps. XXX, 8).

JULY 14

TEMPTATION

To impress it thoroughly upon the mind, the fact bears frequent repetition that every man's life contains a consider-

able admixture of temptation. This truth is recalled for the purpose of reminding those who may be frequently tempted, that frequent temptation is not at all a sign of disfavor with Almighty God, but rather a sign of His love. Spiritual writers are agreed that temptations serve a very good purpose. They are intended to keep the tempted soul in humility, and the more one has advanced in virtue, the more humiliating it is to be tempted, at times by most disgusting suggestions.

Moreover, temptation, when properly resisted, strengthens the virtue against which it is directed. As the tree torn by the wind become only the more firmly rooted, so virtue, when assaulted by temptation, becomes the more securely established in the soul.

Lastly, resistance to temptation is meritorious, and gives the faithful soul treasure upon treasure to lay away in the realm of Heaven. "Some there are who are much troubled [by temptation] in a manner all their life-time. Some are but lightly tempted, according to the wisdom and equity of the ordinance of Goo, who weighs the state and merits of men, and preordains all for the salvation of His elect." "Some are preserved from great temptations and are often overcome in daily little ones; that, being humbled, they may never presume of themselves in great things, who are weak in such small occurrences."

There is no reason, then, for discouragement when temptations come thick and fast upon us. A firm and unrelenting resistance only is necessary, in order that they may prove to our advantage rather than to our detriment.

Resolution: "Let us, therefore, humble our souls under the hand of God in all temptations and tribulations; for the humble in spirit He will save and exalt."

Conclusion: "O my Lord! Assist me, that I may continually labor to overcome nature, to correspond with Thy grace,

to keep Thy commandments and to work out my salvation." (Lasance, *The New Missal,* p. 119).

JULY 15

JUDGING OTHERS

It is a most difficult task at best to judge others rightly. There are too many circumstances which are apt to render our judgment rash and prejudiced. "We frequently judge a thing according as we have it at heart; for we easily lose true judgment through private affection." Our judgment, therefore, is likely to be colored by an attitude of mind. At times, too, incidents without us almost unconsciously influence us in dispensing justice. Moreover, "many of us seek ourselves in what we do, and are not sensible of it."

Two conclusions follow; namely, except for judging every man good, which may be done through charity, even when all indications point to the contrary, never judge anyone. "Judge not, that you may not be judged." Evidence, no matter how seemingly conclusive, may have a flaw as far as guilt before God is concerned. The judges of the secular courts must judge those brought before them. They judge according to secular law, but not even they would presume to pronounce judgment as to the guilt of the accused before God. The court of conscience is beyond their sphere. The confessor must judge in this sphere of conscience but he does so only after the offender has confessed. There is every reason, then, to refrain from judging others and to leave judgment to God.

The second conclusion is that, no matter what we may be accused of, or what the judgment of men may be upon us, we stand guilty or innocent as we are before God. Like St. Paul, those falsely accused or judged may say: "I am not

conscious to myself of anything; yet am I not hereby justified; but He that judgeth me, is the Lord." (1 Cor. IV, 4).

Resolution: "Judge not, that you may not be judged." (Matt. VII, 1).

Conclusion: O God, give me grace to turn back my eyes upon myself, and not to judge the doings of others.

JULY 16

CHARITY

The great law of charity is to love God above all things and our neighbor for God's sake. All our sanctity and merit depends upon the love we bear to God. "For God regards more with how much love and affection a person performs a work than how much he does."

The greatest obstacle to charity is undue self-love. Too often man in his works seeks himself. "That seems often to be charity which is rather natural affection; because our own interest will seldom be wanting." It is no easy task to disengage ourselves from our own interests and seek only to please God out of love for Him. The ideal is to have God always in mind and in all that we do to bring everything in some relation to God. This truth does not imply that our fellow-man should be neglected. Every creature, and especially every rational creature, should be loved for the sake of God. The love of God will prompt us to love every human being, so far as that is possible. So far will this love for our neighbor extend, that it will make us ready to benefit him, even at the expense of omitting some other good work, when the two cannot be combined.

"Evil ought not to be done for anything in the world, or for the love of any man; but for the profit of one who stands

in need, a good work is sometimes freely to be omitted, or rather to be changed for a better, for by doing thus, a good work is not lost, but is changed into a better." Hence the rule, to love God for His own sake and all men for God's sake.

Resolve to seek God's glory in everything.

Conclusion: "Pour upon us, O Lord, the spirit of Thy love, to make us of one heart." (*Missal,* Post Communion for Easter).

JULY 17

MUTUAL CONSIDERATION

There is in our day as little patience in supporting others' defects and infirmities as there was in the days of yore. At first sight there might seem to be more, because the world has assumed the attitude of taking for granted that there must be many annoyances coming from our fellow-man, and the easiest way to deal with them is to ignore them, pass them over and, where possible, entirely avoid the one causing them. The accepted code seems to be: Bother me as little as possible and, I, knowing that I have faults too, will thrust my presence upon you as seldom as I can. Such a rule of action may do for business life, but in the spiritual life it can have no place. Apathy of this kind toward our fellow-Christian is not Christ-like. When others have faults which annoy us, we must, if there be any chance of correcting them, use prudent means of doing so. Our motive ought to be, not so much to relieve ourselves of the annoyance, as to benefit the offender. "If any one, being once or twice admonished, does not comply, contend not with him, but commit all to God, that His will may be done, and He may be honored

in all His servants, Who knows how to convert evil into good." Only after this much has been done, may a man settle down to patience in bearing the annoyances caused. "Think that it is perhaps better so for thy trial and patience, without which our merits are little worth."

Resolution: "Endeavor to be patient in supporting others' defects and infirmities, of what kind soever [for God's sake], because thou also hast many things which others must bear withal."

Conclusion: "Brethren, and if a man be overtaken in any fault, you, who are spiritual, instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens; and you shall fulfill the law of Christ." (Galat. VI, 1–2).

JULY 18

PATIENCE WITH OTHERS

The statement is often made: "I would not get impatient were it not for a certain person who always provokes me." Usually the person referred to is some one in so intimate a relationship with the one who becomes provoked, that it is impossible for the one to avoid the other's company. "But now God has so disposed things that we may learn to bear one another's burdens; for there is no man without defect; no man without his burden; no man sufficient for himself; no man wise enough for himself; but we must support one another, comfort one another, assist, instruct, and admonish one another." This is the will of God.

How could there be patience with one's fellow-man, if our neighbor were perfect? When would there be occasion to practice meekness toward our associates, if the latter never

failed? The occasions for practicing patience do not make a man fail, but show how much patience he has. It is not the provocations which are the reason for one's failure upon any occasion, but rather the lack of sufficient virtue to surmount the provocation. "We are willing that others should be bound up by laws, and we suffer not ourselves by any means to be restrained,"—all of which comes from the fact that we do not consider, at least not practically, that we, as well as all men in their present state, are imperfect, and hence that one is burdensome to the other. "If thou canst not make thyself such a one as thou wouldst, how canst thou expect to have another according to thy liking?" There is only one way of getting along peaceably,—that is to bear with others patiently, as they must in return bear with us.

Resolution: "Grudge not, brethren, one against another, that you may not be judged." (James V, 9).

Conclusion: May God "grant you to be of one mind one towards another"; "that with one mind and with one mouth, you may glorify God." (Rom. XV, 5 sq.).

JULY 19

SINCERITY

A drinking glass may have every appearance of perfection, but, tap it gently with the finger, and the ring will tell you whether the appearances bear out the fact, or whether there is a hidden crack which destroys the perfection of the glass. So, too, a person may have every appearance of sanctity, but we would have to be able to test the soul in order to know whether his sanctity is sincere and genuine.

In our day there is much pretense. Many for the sake of a reputation outwardly appear good and holy, whose souls are

not possessed of the virtues they pretend to have. Unless we beware, we too may be guilty of the same insincerity. "The life of a good and religious man ought to be eminent in all virtues, that he may be such interiorly as he appears to men in his exterior. And with good reason ought he to be so much more in his interior, than exteriorly appears because He who beholds us is God, of whom we ought to stand exceedingly in awe, wherever we are, and like angels walk pure in His sight." Men see the exterior but God looks to the heart. It is what we are before God that counts, not what we are in the eyes of men. We ought to seek to have our souls possessed of far more virtue than appears to the eyes of men. This does not mean to say that some of our virtues should not be disclosed to the sight of men, for Holy Writ itself counsels that we should do good works before men, so that they may glorify the Father who is in Heaven. However, this refers to such works as are commonly done by all men in public. But never ought one deliberately to give an impression of possessing virtues which are not actually in the soul.

Resolution: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things." (Phil. IV, 8).

Conclusion: O Lord, let it not be said of us: "You are they who justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is high to men, is an abomination before God." (Luke XVI, 15).

JULY 20

FIRMNESS

We must be severe with ourselves. The least concession to

our inclinations without compensating reasons is apt to have devastating effects. "A small omission in our exercises seldom passes without some loss." To omit prayer or a good work merely because there is no inclination to it at the time, may not seem to be much, when not done regularly. But the fitful omission here and there is the beginning of a laxity which too often proves disastrous to spiritual life. "If through a loathing of mind, or negligence, it be lightly let alone, it is no small fault, and will prove hurtful." Different, however, if what is left undone, is omitted for some good reason. "If for piety's sake, or with the design to the profit of our brother, we sometimes omit our accustomed exercises, it may afterwards be easily recovered." St. Francis de Sales is said often to have omitted his spiritual exercises for the sake of charity toward his fellow-man, but he strove regularly to make good the omission at some other period of the day.

The spiritual life is eminently reasonable, and when an adequately compensating reason balances the omission of some good work, it may be and generally is an act of virtue to omit it. It must not be thought, however, that because a work or prayer may not be performed at a certain time, it is not to be done at all. No, it ought to be anticipated or transferred to another period of the day, if there be the least possibility of arranging it. A work or prayer ought not readily to be entirely omitted, but rather postponed to some other time, if such postponement is found necessary for a good reason.

Resolution: "Let us endeavor to do what we can, we shall still be apt to fail in many things."

Conclusion: O Lord, help me! "I must work the works of Him that sent me, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." (John IX, 4).

JULY 21

PUBLIC DEVOTIONS

The public devotions prescribed by the Church for all are of far more value than private devotions undertaken by ourselves. There is a special blessing upon works pleasing to God when done by many in common. Besides, there is a natural heightening of devotion in the individual when prayer and adoration are in common, the devotion of the one enkindling like sentiments in the others. From the words of Christ Himself we know that prayer in common is most efficacious, for He says: "I say to you, if two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by my father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. XVIII, 19–20). Therefore, "take care thou be not slack in common exercises, and more forward in things of thy own particular devotion; but having fully and faithfully performed what thou art bound to, and what is enjoined upon thee, if thou hast any time remaining, give thyself to thyself according as thy devotion shall incline thee."

Many are loath to give up a private devotion in favor of one held in public. Very often the excuse is given that they are able to pray with less distractions when alone; the devotion in public does not appeal to them, or a false modesty hinders them from doing their good works or prayers before others. Though a private devotion may seem more advantageous to the individual than a public one, all things being equal, the latter ought to be preferred, for the praise and

advantage of it as mentioned by Holy Writ has never been asserted of private devotions in so high a degree. First, then, follow the public liturgical functions of the Church, those of precept and those merely counseled; after this has been done and there still is time and opportunity, then private devotions will be very pleasing to God.

Resolution: "I will praise Thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify Thy name forever." (Ps. LXXXV, 12).

Conclusion: "Come let us adore and fall down . . . before the Lord that made us." (Ps. XCIV, 6).

JULY 22

PRIVATE DEVOTIONS

The devotions of the Church for the private use of her children are as numerous and variegated as the flowers of summer. "All cannot have the self-same exercise; but this is more proper for one, and that for another. Moreover, according to the diversity of times, diverse exercises are more pleasing; for some relish better on festival days, others on common days. We stand in need of one kind in time of temptation, and of another in time of peace and rest. Some we willingly think on when we are sad, others when we are joyful in the Lord."

Devotions accommodated to the Church seasons are not only more easily followed than others, but also bring variety into our spiritual life. To live the days of Advent with the Blessed Mother and the Christmas holidays with the Holy Child cannot but warm the heart with devotion. To prepare for and extract as much spiritual fruit from the various feasts

of the year, requires only that one keeps them in mind and tries to live into the mystery which they commemorate.

Some prepare for each feast as if it were to be the day on which they are to be called to Heaven. They carefully prepare themselves, converse more devoutly and keep all observances more strictly, as being shortly to receive the reward of their labors from God. And if death be deferred, they believe themselves not yet well enough prepared and unworthy of the great glory which God has in store for them.

Others make their good resolutions from one feast to another. It is always easier to keep good resolutions for a short, definite time, than it is for a long and indefinite period. Hence, resolutions renewed again and again on certain festivals, are apt to be more effectual than more indefinite ones.

Resolution: "About the time of the principal festivals, renew your good exercises and more fervently implore the prayers of the saints."

Conclusion: "O God, who dost gladden us with the yearly solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection grant in Thy loving kindness that, through the temporal feast which we keep, we may be worthy to reach eternal joys." (*Missal,* Prayer for Wednesday after Easter).

JULY 23

THE SOCIETY OF MEN

Many who claim to have no leisure for spiritual exercises, find much time to spend in the company of men. The social conversation, the recreations indulged in with others, and visits merely for social purposes, take up a great portion of

their time, and often without advantage and benefit for themselves or for those with whom they associate. Granting that a certain amount of social intercourse is necessary for all who live in the world, it will be admitted by many who are inclined to take things seriously, that the time spent in this occupation is quite excessive.

Those who spend much time in society cannot as a rule expect to lead devout lives. Their minds are too much occupied with the things of the world to allow time for spiritual devotion. Their souls go out in an exuberance of words, leaving no opportunity for serious thoughts to come into the heart. They know not what it means, at times to hold silence in the privacy of their own homes, and prayerfully to listen to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. Their minds are so dissipated by the distractions of the world that they have never experienced the joy and consolation of an hour given over entirely to God, to commune with Him in thought, and to receive grace and an increase of love of Him in return. Much less do they ever ponder the truths, that: "No man is secure in appearing abroad, but he who would willingly lie hid at home. No man securely speaks, but he who loves to hold his peace. . . . No man securely rejoices, unless he have within him the testimony of a good conscience." Therefore, "if thou wilt withdraw thyself from superfluous talk and idle visits, as also from giving ear to news and reports, thou wilt find time sufficient and proper to employ thyself in good meditations."

Resolution: "Seek a proper time to retire into thyself, and often think of the benefits of God."

Conclusion: "O God, who on this day didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Ghost, grant us, by the same Spirit, to relish what is right and ever to rejoice in His consolation." (*Missal,* Prayer for Whit Sunday).

JULY 24

PERFECT SECURITY

No man can be certain that he will be saved. In fear and trembling ought we to work out our salvation,—not so much for fear of God, who is always true to His promises and indulgent in His goodness and mercy, but for fear of our own innate fickleness and lack of determination and stability. Many a man has started out well, but, due to a lack of knowledge of the weakness of human nature, or to over-confidence, did not persevere to the end, or dropped from his first fervor and barely gained his eternal salvation. "Never promise thyself security in this life, though thou seemest to be a good religious man."

Hence the devout soul will go about with careful circumspection. "Oh, how good a conscience would that man preserve who would never seek after transitory joy, nor ever busy himself with the world. Oh, what great peace and tranquillity would he possess, who would cut off all vain solicitudes and only think of the things of God and his salvation, and place his whole hope in God." As it is impossible for those living in the world to cut themselves off entirely from the world and its concerns, they will use every precaution to escape, as far as they can, the entanglements of the world, knowing their insecurity and the necessity of being continually on their guard against being allured from the path of virtue and good will. However, this very sense of insecurity may be a spur to greater watchfulness and determination on the path of virtue. Hence "it is better for many not to be altogether free from temptation, but to be often

assaulted, that they may not be too secure; lest perhaps they be lifted up with pride, or take more liberty to go aside after exterior comforts."

Resolution: "Never promise thyself security in this life."

Conclusion: "O God, who hast wonderfully created man and more wonderfully redeemed him, grant us, we beseech Thee, to withstand with spiritual reason the allurements of sin, that we may be worthy to reach everlasting joys." (*Missal,* Prayer for Holy Saturday).

JULY 25

RETIREMENT

What his cell is to the monk, that his home ought to be to the layman. No man can live a devout life without a certain amount of retirement. The hermits retired to the desert, where they lived alone and spent their time in praising God and giving themselves up to holy meditation. We are not called upon to imitate their example. The retirement which may be demanded of the devout man of the world is a love for his home and a contentment in being in it. It implies a withdrawal from the world, as far as that is possible for the man living in the world, after having satisfied all his duties to society. It means that a man should enjoy his needed and innocent recreation in the home circle rather than find it necessary to go out to commercialized amusements, which are for the most part dangerous to devotion and always distracting.

Home recreations are as a rule less boisterous, less distracting, and generally innocent. They may more easily be combined with a spirit of piety. The home may and should be sanctified as a house of prayer. After a due time for re-

laxation and recreation has been set aside, there is a period proper for prayer, spiritual reading, and devout conversation. Thus may those who are away from home during a great portion of the day make their homes a place of retirement. Those whose daily work keeps them at home all day can do no better than to strive to follow the example of the Holy Family at Nazareth.

In seclusion a person makes great progress in spiritual life, for "in silence and quiet the devout soul goes forward and learns the secrets of the Scriptures. There she finds floods of tears, with which she may wash and cleanse herself every night; so that she may become so much more familiar with her Maker, by how much the farther she lives from all earthly tumults." For God with his holy angels will draw nigh to him who withdraws himself from his acquaintances and friends.

Resolution: "Shut thy door upon thee and call to thee Jesus, thy beloved."

Conclusion: O God, let me take to heart your words: "When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee." (Matt. VI, 6).

JULY 26

VISITING

Frequent visiting is not conducive to a devout life. "A joyful going abroad often brings forth a sorrowful coming home; and a merry evening makes a sad morning." The necessary visits which society demands are not to be neglected, lest one stamp himself as being eccentric. And eccentricity should be avoided, for it makes virtue distaste-

ful if the impression is given that it is necessary to be eccentric to be virtuous. Better by far is it to make visits occasionally, and while doing so severely to guard ourselves against sin.

The dangers of much visiting are especially two; first, the dissipation of all recollection, and secondly, the many sins of the tongue which are apt to be committed. "The desires of senuality draw thee abroad; but when the hour is past, what dost thou bring home, but a weight upon thy conscience, and a dissipation of heart." The unrestrained gratification of the senses even in lawful things cannot but destroy the peace and quiet of the soul. Much visiting has the same effect upon the soul as walking the busy marts of a metropolis would have in search of peace and quiet. Again, what one hears and says at such times is not so guarded as at other times. Severe reserve has little place in company. "It is easier to keep retired at home, than to be able to be sufficiently on one's guard abroad." Those who enjoy no peace of soul would do well to ask themselves, whether too much visiting be not the cause. "If thou hadst not gone abroad and hearkened to rumors, thou hadst kept thyself better in good peace; but since thou art delighted sometimes to hear news, thou must from thence suffer a disturbance of heart." Happy the man who, without being eccentric, can limit his visiting to the requirements of charity and society, for he, if any, will enjoy peace and quiet of soul.

Resolution: "Leave vain things to vain people; but mind thou the things which God has commanded thee."

Conclusion: "Give me that peace the world can never give,
And in Thy loving presence let me live.
Ah, show me always, Lord, Thy holy will
And to each troubled thought, say, 'Peace, be still."

(R. Trainer, Peace with Jesus).

JULY 27

CONCENTRATION

In our days there are few in any sphere of life who have acquired the faculty of concentration. It is greatly lacking in the spiritual life. Men have a bird's-eye view, as it were, of a devout life, but they have no vision of its details. Because of the many distractions, either deliberately or unavoidably encountered, a man has neither the time nor the inclination to rivet his attention on obtaining a correct knowledge of or of practicing the known precepts which constitute a spiritual life.

When there is deliberate neglect of concentrated effort to lead a devout life, the result must inevitably be that the spiritual life of that person will be very indifferent and lacking zeal and fervor. When the reason of this lack of concentration is the unavoidable distractions of our daily lives, then, "If thou wouldst make any progress, keep thyself in the fear of God, and be not too free, but restrain all thy senses under discipline, and give not thyself up to foolish mirth."

It comes down to the restraint of the senses. The senses must not have all they crave for, even though what is wanted is not sinful. "There is no true liberty nor good joy, but in the fear of God with a good conscience."

Despite the many distractions and the allurements for the gratification of the senses, we must strive to keep our minds concentrated upon the real significance of life and the means of attaining its real goal. "It is wonderful that any man can heartily rejoice in this life, who weighs and considers his banishment, and the many dangers of his soul." However,

our corrupt nature is prone to distraction and dissipation of heart, and so much more meritorious, therefore, is the effort to concentrate our minds and efforts in serving God zealously and devotedly. "Give thyself to compunction of heart, and thou shalt find devotion."

Resolution: "Strive manfully; custom is overcame by custom."

Conclusion: "Enlighten our minds, we beseech Thee, O Lord, with the light of Thy brightness, that we may be able to see what things ought to be done and have strength to perform the things that are just." (*Missal,* Prayer for Thursday of the first week of Lent).

JULY 28

COMPUNCTION

Compunction is synonymous with self-reproach. Although there is no place in a devout life for sadness, yet there is reason for self-reproach. Because of the many sins committed even by the best of men, each has sufficient reason for self-reproach.

Especially is this true of those striving to lead a devout life. God has favored these souls with special graces, and despite this favor, they are guilty of many sins. It is true, the sins of a devout person may not be ascribed to malice, but they are attributable to a certain carelessness, or indifference, or lack of energy, which is blameworthy, particularly in view of the fact that God has singled out that soul for His special love. Moreover, those somewhat advanced in spiritual life are given graces such as are not likely to be the share of the ordinary man, and still, notwithstanding this profusion of grace, there is at times less zeal and fervor in the recipient

than in many who are not looked upon as among the more devout Christians, although in reality these latter may excel the former in sincerity and genuine effort. Therefore, "the subjects for just grief and interior compunction are our vices and sins, in which we lie entangled in such a manner as seldom to be able to contemplate heavenly things. . . . That we have not divine comforts or seldomer experience them, is our own fault; because we do not seek compunction of heart, nor cast off altogether vain and outward satisfaction." Our lack of energy in the service of God ought always to be before our eyes. It should be a spur to keep us zealous and fervent, and prevent us from falling into a state of lukewarmness in our love of God. And should we experience a lack of consolation in our spiritual life, let us look to ourselves and examine whether we are not to blame because of a falling away from our initial fervor in the love and service of God.

Resolution: "Let thy concern be . . . to carry thyself so well and circumspectly as it becomes a servant of God and a devout, religious man to demean himself."

Conclusion: "May Thy grace, we beseech Thee, O Lord, not depart from us, but render us devoted to Thy holy service and ever obtain for us Thine aid." (*Missal,* Prayer for Thursday in the second week of Lent).

JULY 29

DESIRES

All men have the innate desire to be happy. God Himself implanted this craving in the hearts of men, and it will never be totally satisfied until, as St. Augustine says, the soul rests

in God. The only adequate and complete stilling of the desire for happiness is the possession of God.

Many are deceived with the thought that riches can make one perfectly happy. The glitter and glamour of wealth would make it appear that those who possess it are happy. "Many unstable and weak men are apt to say: Behold how well such a one lives, how rich, how great, how powerful he is! But attend to heavenly goods, and thou wilt see that all these temporal things are as nothing, very uncertain, and rather burdensome; because they are never possessed without care and fear." Only the spiritual-minded will realize and be convinced of this truth. Hence, so many make riches their desire, and fulfill the saying of Holy Scripture that they make mammon their God.

The desire for riches as a means of gaining happiness is the most prevalent desire of men today, outside of those who have learnt the Christian truth that happiness is to be found in the love and service of God alone. "The happiness of a man consisteth not in having temporal things in abundance, but a moderate competency sufficeth." In this world, to love and serve God faithfully, is to be happy, even though this service costs a sacrifice. "Who is there who is most at ease? Doubtless he who is willing to suffer something for God's sake." All desires for anything outside of God to gain happiness are vain and fruitless, unless they are co-ordinated with the desire for the possession of God.

Resolve to be like St. Paul," "having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ."

Conclusion: "Let the ears of Thy mercy, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy suppliants, and, that Thou mayest grant their desires to them that seek, make them to ask those things only that are pleasing to Thee." (*Missal,* Prayer for the ninth Sunday after Pentecost).

JULY 30

EARTHLY NECESSITIES

In striking contrast to the man given to the satisfying of his senses, is the devout man, who would be released from the very necessities of earthly life in order the better to be spiritual. "For to eat, drink, watch, sleep, rest, labor, and be subject to other necessities of nature, is truly a misery and affliction to a devout man, who desires to be released and free from all sin. For the inward man is very much burdened with the necessities of the body in this world." In all these things there is an element of danger, from using them to excess or from their alluring us to sensuality. Wherefore the Psalmist prays: "From my necessities, deliver me, O Lord." (Ps. XXIV). They are like the cord that restrains the bird which would wing its flight upward. Instead of giving his attention to these earthly necessities, the devout man wishes to direct it to spiritual things. He begrudges both the time and the energy required to obtain the things of earth, thinking to use both his time and energy to better advantage in the pursuit of the spiritual. And yet, as God has so ordained for man's earthly life, he must use all these earthly things but reasonably, without attachment to them and with a view to make them act as an aid in advancing his spiritual life. Thus only are they tolerable for the soul on fire with a love of God and zealous in His service.

How different this attitude from that assumed by the worldling, who finds his delight in dining and feasting, in ease and comfort, rest and repose, in delicacies and luxuries. How can such direct their minds to spiritual things,

when they are so sodden with the things of the world, "whose end is destruction; whose God is their belly; and whose glory is in their shame; who mind earthly things." (Phil. III, 19).

Resolution: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor. X, 31).

Conclusion: "Grant us, we beseech Thee, O Lord, so to abstain from carnal delicacies, that we may likewise fast from the sins that overwhelm us." (*Missal,* Prayer for the September Ember days, Saturday).

JULY 31

PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination is so baneful, even in secular life, that Benjamin Franklin framed the proverb: "Never put off till tomorrow what you can do to-day." In the spiritual life the same ill effects follow the practice of putting off until another time what can be done now. Very often the proposed action is omitted altogether, or circumstances arise which deprive it of much of the good it would have had before; or again in the deferred time it may be more difficult of accomplishment, or, finally, because of the delay, it may have to be performed hurriedly and superficially, merely to get it finished.

So often we resolve with seeming earnestness and seriousness that we will begin a more fervent spiritual life. That start, however, is deferred, and often the angel of death cuts off the proposal, and we stand before the judgment seat of God, with good intentions perhaps, but with little accomplished. "Why wilt thou put off thy resolution from day to

day? Arise and begin this very moment and say: Now is the time for doing, and now is the time to fight: now is the proper time to amend my life." To wait for a time when we shall have leisure, when we are at peace and have few temptations, and when our conscience is easy and we have few distractions, is to wait for a time that will never come. "When thou art troubled and afflicted, then is the time to merit. Thou must pass through fire and water before thou comest to refreshment. Unless thou dost violence to thyself, thou wilt not overcome vice."

Temptation must be combated as it approaches us; we may never delay in fighting it off if we hope to be successful. Virtue must be cultivated daily, it must continually grow. Even the saints had to fight daily to retain what they had acquired; how will one who delays ever be able either to acquire virtue or retain what he has?

Resolution: "Arise and begin this very moment."

Conclusion: "Vouchsafe, O Lord, by Thy grace to make fruitful the fervor of our devotion." (*Missal,* Prayer for Saturday in the 4th week of Lent).

AUGUST 1

FREEDOM FROM SIN

It is with sincere regret that the devout soul sees that there can be no entire freedom from sin for him. Not that after Baptism such freedom in itself were impossible, but because the consequences of original sin make it improbable. Not even the greatest saints were free from all sin, the great exception being the Blessed Mother of God through a spe-

cial privilege from her Divine Son. Some few others may have been similarly privileged, but it was through a very special favor on the part of Almighty God. The other saints, as well as serious aspirants to sanctity, must humbly acknowledge that they are sinners, not only in the accepted sense that we all are sinners, but also in reality, almost daily committing sin, if not deliberate, at least faults and imperfections for which we are responsible. "As long as we carry about us this frail body, we cannot be without sin, nor live without uneasiness and sorrow. . . . Oh, how great is human frailty, which is always prone to vice! To-day thou confessest thy sins, and tomorrow thou again committest what thou hast confessed. Now thou resolvest to take care, and an hour after thou dost as if thou hadst never resolved."

These facts ought to impress upon us the need of constant watchfulness and prayer, lest we continually fall into sin, and teach us the necessity of the severest caution not to fall from a life of grace and few sins into a life of vice and many sins. That such sudden transformation can easily take place may be seen from the fall of Adam and Eve, Judas, St. Peter, and many others.

It behooves every man and especially those, who are in earnest about their salvation, to strive for that degree of freedom from sin which their frailty and human weakness allows, and to be ever on their guard for fear of falling from a life of virtue into a life of sin. This last state is apt to ensue upon the raising of the barrier of restraint and upon an indifference in avoiding all sin.

Resolution: "We have reason, therefore, to humble ourselves, and never to think much of ourselves, since we are so frail and inconstant."

Conclusion: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; Heal me, O Lord." (Ps. VI, 3).

AUGUST 2

SLACKENING

Many experience that after a good start upon a devout life, they either find themselves slackening in their efforts because they have become more or less satisfied with their present state, or because of weariness in being constantly held in severe restraint. "Woe be to us if we are to give ourselves to rest, as if we had already met with peace and security, when there does not appear any mark of true sanctity in our conversation." Or if tiring, "what will become of us in the end, who grow lukewarm so very soon."

Spiritual life is paralyzed by either of these faults. The first stops efforts to progress, since the person with this attitude has no ambition to proceed farther, and as a result, "that may be lost quickly through negligence which with much labor and time was hardly gotten by grace." The second fault, weariness, causes one's efforts to weaken or to be omitted altogether, because discouragement robs one of that zest and joy in doing good which makes the burden placed upon us by God light and his yoke sweet. Those slackening their efforts because of satisfaction with their present state, must bestir themselves, lest they lose all they have gained in a spiritual life and they be rejected by God, for there is hardly any fault so severely condemned as lukewarmness. St. John in the Apocalypse quotes these words of the Holy Spirit to the lukewarm: "I know thy works, that are neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold, or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth." (III, 15–16). Those who are wearied are in need of encouragement. What more encour-

aging than the words of our Lord: "Come to Me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you." (Matt. XI, 28).

Resolution: "Be holy because I [God] am holy." (Lev. XI, 44).

Conclusion: "Let Thy grace, we beseech Thee, O Lord, ever go before us and follow us, and may it make us to be continually zealous in doing good works." (*Missal,* Prayer for the 16th Sunday after Pentecost).

AUGUST 3

THE THOUGHT OF DEATH

The thought of death differs in various individuals and in the different stages of life. Children and the old very often have no fear of death. Those in the adolescent period of life, in early manhood and womanhood, as well as those in middle age, are generally very much afraid of death. Just entering, or being in the midst of the turmoil of life's activity, the mind is absorbed with the things of this world, and one's supreme ambition is for success in this life. "Oh, the dulness and hardness of man's heart, which only thinks of what is present, and looks not forward to things to come!" Hence when the thought of death comes, it is frightening. As yet there has been so little preparation, there has been so little done for the life to come. To be abruptly torn out of the interests and concerns of this present life was never anticipated, never planned for and never seriously considered. And yet just that may happen, and, what is more, even if there is some little time given for preparation through sickness, it is all too short, when we consider that many years of preparation would not be enough.

The thought of death ought to be a familiar one with us. We should think of death in all our works. "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." (Ecclus. VII, 40). Our work ought never to engross us to such an extent as to allow us to lose sight of the life to come, and as death is the passage into this eternal life, the thought of death ought always to be kept in mind. "Blessed is he that has always the hour of death before his eyes, and every day dispossess himself to die." The thought of death would not be frightful for him "who strives to be such now in this life as he desires to be found at his death."

Resolve "in every action and thought so to order thyself as if thou wert immediately to die."

Conclusion: "Prostrate, suppliant, now no more,
Unrepenting as of yore,
Save me dying, I implore."
(*Missal,* Mass for the Dead, Sequence).

AUGUST 4

AFTER DEATH

"It is better now to provide in time and send some good before thee, than to trust to others helping thee after death." It is very imprudent not to make some provision against the time when we shall have to suffer in Purgatory. Few, indeed, will go directly to Heaven after death; most of us will have to sojourn for a time in the cleansing fires of Purgatory to satisfy for venial sins not yet forgiven and other sins already forgiven but not fully atoned for. To live without ever adverting to this fact means to enter upon the next life without having had the least concern about what will occur there, and consequently our debt and the chances of a speedy sat-

isfaction of it will be disconcerting, when for the first time the whole truth, breaks in upon us.

It is the part of wisdom then, to prepare now for that which will inevitably come. Prudence would suggest that we practice a certain amount of penance in this life to satisfy for sin. Every opportunity to gain indulgences for our souls should also be grasped. Moreover, "Make now to thyself friends, by honoring the saints of God, and imitating their actions; that when thou shalt fail in this life, they may receive thee into everlasting dwellings." Besides this, we may be assured of friends in our need, if we often in life aid the poor souls now suffering in Purgatory. By the time we get there they most probably will have attained the glory of Heaven, and then they will not forget the acts of charity performed on their behalf. They could not forget, for that would be ingratitude, and there can be no ingratitude in Heaven. "If thou art not now careful for thyself, who will be careful for thee hereafter?" Think often of what your state will be after death, and provide against that time. After a man dies, "and when he is taken away from sight, he is quickly also out of mind. . . . Who will remember thee when thou art dead, and who will pray for thee? . . . It is better now to provide in time and send some good before thee, than to trust to others helping thee after death."

Resolution: "Chastise thy body now by penance, that thou mayest then have an assured confidence."

Conclusion: "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. (*Missal,* Mass for the Dead).

AUGUST 5

THE TRIAL

Immediately after death, as we know from our catechism, will follow the particular judgment. The personnel, as we are

wont to think, will be Christ as Judge, the soul on trial, and the attorneys, *i. e.,* the guardian angel as the defending, and the devil as the prosecuting lawyer. The trial is a short one. Man stands there either conscious of his innocence or fully aware of his guilt. The testimony of the good angel, as well as that of the bad, is admitted without any question; there is no quibbling, no cross-examining; all present are fully aware of what the judgment must be. There is the all-just God and the judgment pronounced will be unquestionably just. His sentence will be indisputably fair.

When we stand before that judgment seat, all will hinge on this question: "Are we innocent or are we guilty?" If innocent, justice cannot miscarry, and the result will be that we shall be admitted to the eternal bliss of Heaven. If guilty, justice cannot be restrained and the adequate punishment will surely follow. "In all things look to thy end, and how thou shalt be able to stand before a severe Judge, from whom nothing is hidden, who takes no bribes, nor receives excuses, but will judge that which is just."

There is but one means of security and that is, to live now as you would wish to have lived when standing before the judgment seat of God. Surely this thought should keep the soul free from mortal sins and from deliberate venial sins. The thought of judgment, however, must be kept continually before one's mind in order to be effective. Nor is this task over difficult for those who strive to be recollected amidst the distractions of the world, imbued as they must be with the seriousness of that one true object of life, to save their immortal souls.

Resolution: "Be careful at present and sorrowful for thy sins; that in the day of judgment thou mayest be secure with the blessed."

Conclusion: "O God, the protector of all who hope in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, multi-

ply Thy mercy upon us, that with Thee for our Ruler and Leader, we may so pass through the good things of this life as not to lose those which are eternal." (*Missal*, Prayer for the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost).

AUGUST 6

REWARD

Many have been supported, while performing a difficult task, by the thought of the reward that would be forthcoming. The man wearied and fatigued by the day's work, continues until the labor is finished or the day is ended, because he anticipates the wage to be received. The runner, all but exhausted, forces himself on in the race, looking forward to the prize. The professional man never ceases in his work and study, knowing that success will crown his efforts. Everywhere there is this allurement of a reward, even though it be nothing material, but only an elation or elevation of one's own personal feelings.

God put this delight in the heart of man in striving for and gaining a reward. As it is a spur to effort in the natural order of things, so too, should it be an aid in the supernatural. Hence, the thought of gaining Heaven should be a frequent one for the man toiling daily to become spiritual as well as to be materially successful. God has given us such positive assurances of Heaven, that we should have confidence and a firm hope of one day obtaining this inestimable reward. The thought of everlasting happiness ought to overshadow all our actions. Rather than to be so engrossed in earthy things as to be bound to the world, we ought like St. Paul, to desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, animated by an active hope and an eager desire to possess the

promised reward. For many Heaven seems to be something far distant, to be attained only after long years of waiting. They little realize that it would be enjoyed were they to die presently. Age, condition of life, responsibilities cannot dull the joys of Heaven. Could we go to Heaven immediately, we should be perfectly happy and all our former concerns on earth would happily adjust themselves. Would that we had a genuine desire for Heaven!

Resolution: "Hope in the Lord and do good." (Ps. XXXVI, 3).

Conclusion: "O God, who . . . by Thine only begotten Son, vanquishing death, hast unlocked for us the gate of eternity, help us to obtain the desires to which Thou hast led us by Thine inspirations." (*Missal,* Prayer for Easter Sunday).

AUGUST 7

CHRIST CRUCIFIED

Besides remembering in all our works our last end so that we will not sin, there is another thought for those who love God, which is equally effective, namely, the thought of Jesus crucified. In contemplating the Passion and death of our dear Lord we find sufficient motives for a deep and sincere love of God, as well as all reasons for not offending Him by sin. "A religious man who exercises himself seriously and devoutly in the most holy life and Passion of our Lord, shall find there abundantly all things profitable and necessary for him; nor need he seek for anything better outside of Jesus." The extreme of Christ's love for men, as disclosed by His Passion and death, cannot but solicit counter-love from men of good will. Who, after acquainting himself with the details of Christ's Passion and meditating on the motives prompting

this excess of pain and suffering endured for the sins of men, would not be urged to love? Those who love our Blessed Saviour surely will not easily commit a sin against Him, especially not a grievous sin.

The difficulty, however, is that we do not bring His sufferings to our minds with a sympathetic realization of what they mean both for Him and for us. We have only a faint conception of the pain He endured and but a feeble comprehension of the effects His Passion had for each one of us personally. Our sympathy is like to that we would extend to a poor unfortunate who is hung for a crime in some far off city. There is sympathy, but it is nothing like that which we would feel if the unfortunate one were a good friend or brother of ours. This sympathy would be turned to love and amplified, if the one dying were doing so for us, or in our stead through some miscarriage of justice, which it were beyond our power to rectify. Yet this is just what happened when Christ died on the Cross for us. Can we realize that? If we can, we shall love God, we shall not sin.

Resolution: "Be mindful of the resolution thou hast taken and set before thee the image of the crucifix."

Conclusion: "Oh, if our crucified Jesus did but come into our hearts, how quickly and sufficiently learned should we be!"

AUGUST 8

MYSTICISM

"The Kingdom of God is within you," (Luke XVII, 21). This means that there is a world within us as vast and varied as the visible world without us. Not a material world, it is true, but a spiritual world, that has its activities and concerns equally as important as those of the outside world in which

we live. This inner world is the world of the mind or the soul. Within it lies the Kingdom of God, which is the realm of mysticism.

The Kingdom of God is not one of extent and space, but rather a combination of all those relations and activities that occupy the soul with God. That particularly sweet occupation of leading an interior life, engaged in living for, in, and with God, intimately, even in this life, is an idea of mysticism. St. Francis de Sales says of it in his treatise on *The Love of God* (Bk. VI, c. 1): "Prayer and mystic theology are nothing else than a conversation by which the soul carries on a loving intercourse with God, through which to attain full union with him."

The more we withdraw our minds from the things of this world and concentrate them upon interior things, the closer we shall approach to God. "Learn to despise exterior things and give thyself to the interior, and thou shalt see the Kingdom of God come unto thee. For the kingdom of God is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, which is not given to the wicked. Christ will come to thee, discovering to thee His consolation, if thou wilt prepare Him a fit dwelling within thee." St. Francis says also, in the same book and place that this indwelling is called mystic because it is secret, and the intercourse between God and the soul which it fosters is appreciable only to those who practice it." The living of this interior life is known usually only to the soul and God. It is compatible with any vocation in life, as it in no way interferes with our necessary duties.

Resolution: "Make room for Christ within thee."

Conclusion: "O God, take possession of Thy kingdom in my soul, for Thou hast said: 'If any man love Me, He will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.' " (John XIV, 23).

AUGUST 9

THE CORRECT ATTITUDE TOWARD CREATURES

To those who enjoy an intimate intercourse with Jesus, creatures have a different aspect than for those not advanced to this stage of devotion. To the former they soon become wearisome because of the higher joy and pleasure afforded by Christ and the things of Christ. To the latter they are objects to which they are still much attached and without which they would be very unhappy. Whether the creature be a person or thing, when one is much given to it, it supplants the love we would otherwise give to God. And after all, creatures are so fickle, they give us pleasure to-day, tomorrow they are loathsome; to-day they are beautiful, tomorrow they are faded; to-day they exist, tomorrow they are destroyed. How can it be otherwise in a world that is transitory? This life was never intended to be a lasting one, why then should the appurtenances of it be so gratifying as to make man satisfied with this life, and leave in him no desire nor yearning for something better?

So, too, with rational creatures, were they to satisfy man in all his needs and desires, what would be the need of the protection, help, and love of God? If creatures do not reach these expectations, it shows that they are to be used only in so far as they can help us in this life to gain our end, namely, eternal life in the world to come.

Creatures, rational and irrational, are imbued with a power to give us this aid in life to reach our goal. All that we seek or attain beyond this is apt to disappoint and disgust us. "He to whom all things relish as they are, that is, in God,

who is the very truth, not as they are said or esteemed to be, is wise indeed, and taught rather by God than men." Remember, "all things pass away, and thou along with them. See thou cleavest not to them, lest thou be ensnared and be lost. Let thy thought be with the most High, and thy prayer directed to Christ without intermission."

Resolve to reject exterior comfort and to contemplate heavenly things.

Conclusion: "Sweet Jesus, be my love!"

AUGUST 10

MEDITATIVE PRAYER

The word meditation, says St. Francis de Sales (*Love of God,* Bk. VI, c. 11), "is largely used in Holy Scripture, and means an attentive, oft-repeated thought, calculated to excite good or evil affections." As prayer, it will naturally excite good and holy affections. "Let thy thought be with the most High and thy prayer directed to Christ without intermission. If thou knowest not how to meditate on high and heavenly things, rest on the Passion of Christ, and willingly dwell in His Sacred Wounds."

Neither time nor place nor occupation are a hindrance to the man who has learnt to meditate. "A lover of Jesus and of truth, and a true internal man, that is free from inordinate affections, can freely turn himself to God, and in spirit elevate himself above himself and rest in enjoyment."

Moreover, "he who knows how to walk internally, and to make little account of external things, is not at a loss for proper places or times for performing devout exercises. An internal man quickly recollects himself because he never

pours forth his whole self upon outward things. Exterior labor is no prejudice to him, nor any employment which for a time is necessary; but as things fall out, he so accommodates himself to them."

This meditative prayer "implies a frame of mind, or devout existence of a soul that consciously or unconsciously lives in God and for God, frequently runs to Him as the center of its existence, its beginning and its last end, is united to Him by grace, feels that its indisputable obligation is to refer all to him, to live, to work, to die for Him, and to make all other interests secondary to His service." (Anonymous). If this habit of turning our thoughts to God and to holy things has gained such a hold on our souls that in any place, at any time, and amdist any occupation our mind dwells, without effort upon God and holy things, then we have the spirit of meditative prayer.

Resolution: "Learn to despise exterior things, and give thyself to the interior, and thou shalt see, the Kingdom of God will come into thee."

Conclusion: "Lord Jesus, make me know thee." (St. Augustine).

AUGUST 11

CONFIDENCE IN MEN

Those who are not engrossed with the thought of God and heavenly things, are commonly engaged with the thought of mortal men. In trial they have confidence in the aid they may be able to obtain from good friends, in misfortune they trust to rehabilitate themselves by means of help derived from those for whom they did a similar favor. In time of sorrow they go to unburden themselves to their most intimate asso-

ciates, and in time of trouble they go to such as command influence. And in almost in every case, even when the results are partially successful, there is disappointment, dissatisfaction, and often despair. The reason is because God admits of no substitute. "Men quickly change, and presently fail, but Christ remains forever, and stands by us firmly to the end."

Nor must we think that the good Saviour takes no interest in our petty affairs, or that He is unwilling to help us. Whatever good qualities we may expect to find in a friend, He has in a superabundant degree. "When thou hast Christ, thou art rich, and He is sufficient for thee: He will provide for thee, and will be thy faithful procurator in all things, so that thou needest not trust to men."

Equally disappointing is the confidence we place in the opinions of men. Their opinion can make us no better and no worse than we actually are in the sight of Almighty God. "Place thy whole confidence in God, and let Him be thy fear and thy love." If He approves our life, man's commendation is unnecessary. It is not meant, however, that the good opinion of men is not to be sought and preserved, but this should be done more for God's sake and for the sake of good example rather than for our own. "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father." (Matt. V, 16).

Resolution: "There is no great confidence to be put in frail mortal man, though he be profitable and beloved, nor much grief to be taken, if sometimes he be against thee and cross thee."

Conclusion: "Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who seek the favor of Thy protection, may be delivered from all evil and serve Thee with a quiet mind." (*Missal,* Prayer over the people, 3rd Week of Lent).

AUGUST 12

PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion affects the devout man very little, except in as much as it concerns the glory of God or His dishonor. When the honor and glory of God are not in question, it matters very little to him what men think of him or of his actions, provided his conduct be above reproof. He knows very well "the great damage generally inflicted on the vigor of the spiritual and apostolic life by the dread of incurring the scorn of men of the world, who make it a rule to revile whomsoever wishes to lead a godly life, and to practice the pious exercises which his state of life demands of him—at one time by slights, at others by cutting remarks and unkind words." (*Short Meditations,* Wed. in 6th Week after Epiphany, transl. by Dom E. J. Luck, O. S. B.) Hence a certain amount of criticism is to be expected from the children of the world, the more so as a devout life is a continual, though tacit, rebuke for their own mode of living. Accordingly, we are advised: "Make no great account of who is for thee or against thee, but let it be thy business and thy care that God may be with thee in everything thou doest."

Under the eagle eye of our critics there certainly will be some faults and defects discovered. The exaggeration and severe censure they will receive will indeed be embarrassing and humiliating. "Oftentimes it is very profitable for keeping us in greater humility, that others know and reprehend our faults." And should our good reputation suffer, we may confidently look to God for vindication. "If thou canst but hold thy peace and suffer, thou shalt see without doubt that the Lord will help thee. He knows the time and manner of de-

livering thee, and therefore, thou must resign thyself to Him." Only bear the trial humbly, for, "the humble man God protects and delivers; the humble He loves and comforts; to the humble He inclines Himself; to the humble He gives grace; and after he has been depressed, raises him to glory."

Resolution: "Never think thou hast made any progress till thou lookest upon thyself as inferior to all."

Conclusion: O Jesus, who hast said, "Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven," grant that I may suffer all reproach humbly and out of love for Thee.

AUGUST 13

A PEACEABLE MAN

The man who is given to meditation on God and the things of the soul has no time for criticizing his fellow-man. He is at peace with God and therefore must strive to be at peace with all men. Being sincere with his God, he is also sincere with his neighbor. Judging others by the same rule, he is not troubled by petty suspicions, but gives every man credit for sincerity. Thus, not in an attitude of strife toward others, he acts freely, frankly, and not over-cautiously. He does what he knows is his duty, and omits what is to be omitted, not minding what others do or not do. Acting independently yet considerately, he neither blindly follows the bad example of one nor disdainfully neglects the good example of another. He is more concerned about what he himself should do to please God, than about what others are doing or not doing. Supposing him now to be a man having no authority over others, he has little to criticize in others,

since he has so much to correct himself. "Have, therefore, a zeal, in the first place, over thyself, and then thou mayest justly exercise thy zeal towards thy neighbor."

The man who is at peace with his neighbors, will be extremely generous toward his fellow-man. He will be patient with them, knowing that he himself is by no means perfect in patience and that it is better to correct oneself than to correct others. He will be widely liberal in the judgment of others' conduct and motives, aware of how imperfect he himself is and how often he has been misunderstood. He will be meek and kind towards all, ever remembering how good and kind God has been to him, although he is less deserving of His favors than his fellow-man. Those who act in this manner will influence their associates for good without consciously having this purpose in view.

Resolution: "Keep thyself first in peace, and then thou will be able to bring others to peace."

Conclusion: The love of God has gathered us together. Let us exalt and be joyful in Him. Let us fear and love the living God. And let us love one another with sincere hearts.

AUGUST 14

PURITY OF INTENTION

Too often the good actions of the devout man are vitiated because he has no pure intention. By a pure intention we understand an undivided intention. Some have, it is true, the intention of honoring Almighty God, but there is also present some selfish motive which tends to their own advantage.

The desire to gain a reputation for piety often surreptitiously enters the intention to please God. Vanity accompanies the performance of some good work. Vain-glory follows upon the success of an action undertaken for God. The comfort of honors carried for Christ is more sought than their burdens. The hardships of sacrifice borne for Christ are relieved by an indulgence in creature comforts. Prayer is performed because of the sweetness experienced in it. In all of these things there is the intention of honoring God; however it is not a pure intention; there is much selfish satisfaction aimed at, which robs our good works of their full merit and value.

Only as we advance in virtue shall we be able to purify our intention of all self-seeking and be pleased to honor God for His own sake, and gladly to suffer any discomfort in doing so for the love of Him. "As iron put into the fire loses its rust and becomes all aglow, so a man who lives wholly for God, puts off his sluggishness, and is changed into a new man. When a man begins to grow lukewarm, however, he is afraid of a little labor, and willingly takes external comfort. But when he begins perfectly to overcome himself, and to walk manfully in the way of God, then he makes less account of those things which before he considered burdensome. . . . If thou intendest and seekest nothing else but the will of God and the profit of thy neighbor, thou shalt enjoy internal liberty,"—a liberty freeing from the entanglements of selfish motives.

Resolution: "All for the honor and glory of God." (St. Ignatius).

Conclusion: "Let the operation of Thy mercy, we beseech Thee, O Lord, direct our hearts, for without Thee we cannot please Thee." (*Missal,* Prayer for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost).

AUGUST 15

CONSIDERATENESS

To be considerate of others is not only a trait of the courteous man, but, when inspired by a good intention, it is converted into a supernatural virtue. The word is only the secular term for what in a Christian is brotherly love. Unselfishness is another word expressing the same thing. The intelligent Catholic realizes only too well his shortcomings, making him conscious of the fact that what he would blame in others might be reprehended in himself. He assumes the rôle of the hypocrite if he is severe with others either in thought, word or deed, concerning faults which he himself is prone to commit. It is a tendency of human nature to blame little things in others and to pass over great things in ourselves, to be quick at perceiving and weighing what we suffer from others and not to mind what others suffer from us.

This tendency it at once recognized by the devout man and he prefers the care of himself to all other cares, diligently watches himself, and is easily silent with regard to others. Realizing that he has sufficient to correct and improve in himself, he is little concerned about the faults of others, and when he must take cognizance of them, he judges as liberally as possible, and excuses wherever he can. The man who is anxious about his personal sanctification will be the most considerate and charitable toward others. Many of the faults which he would otherwise notice will escape him, and the knowledge of his own frailty will make him tender toward those with whom he comes in contact. He will have a deep appreciation of the limitations and weaknesses of hu-

man nature, and in his relations with his fellow-beings he will be always most considerate.

Resolution: Be hard on yourself, but gentle, loving, and indulgent towards your neighbor.

Conclusion: O Lord Jesus, who didst pray: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," graciously grant us a similar charity toward our neighbors, so that we may love and serve Thee with them.

AUGUST 16

A GOOD CONSCIENCE

By a good conscience is meant a conscience free from habits of sin. There may be an occasional lapse into lesser sins, but a habitual falling even into these is not the case in one said to have a good conscience. It demands not only integrity in action but also in intention. It does not desire the praise of men so long as it receives the praise of God. It affords the possessor peace, joy, and tranquillity, no matter what the condition of things is about him. Reputation, which means so much to most men, signifies little to him, since he cares not what others may think or say of him, provided, however, that his conscience does not accuse him of wrong; all else he will leave to God. After all, the honors and glory which he may receive in this life are trifling in comparison to the glory of the next world. Should his real worth be underestimated or ignored altogether in this world, it is of little moment, for strict justice will be done him in the next world. There he will be seen as he actually is, neither worse nor better, and neither will the good repute he held before man be of any avail unless he measures up to it, nor will the poor reputation he possessed harm him, so long as it was a

false index to his true worth. He may then rest quiet and await a vindication, regardless of the opinion of men concerning him. If true, he may rejoice; if false, he may rejoice also, feeling assured that one day he will be vindicated. "The glory of men is in their own consciences, not in the mouths of men." Moreover, "he who seeks no outward testimony for himself, shows plainly that he has committed himself wholly to God." He has not placed his confidence in vain. "For not he who commendeth himself, is approved, but he, whom God commendeth." (2 Cor. X, 18). For which only one thing is needed, to have a good conscience.

Resolution: "Keep a good conscience and thou wilt always have joy."

Conclusion: "Ever graciously bestow upon us with abundance, we beseech Thee O Lord, the spirit of thinking and doing the things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without Thee, may have the strength to live in conformity with Thee." (*Missal,* Prayer for the 8th Sunday after Pentecost).

AUGUST 17

THE LOVE OF JESUS

For the soul initiated into the devout life there is only one source of genuine joy and peace, and that is a tender, confiding love of Jesus. This love of our dear Lord must be exclusive. We must give up the love of all other creatures for Him, or if we may licitly love them, do so only for His sake. As a bridegroom resents any love in his bride which is not compatible with her love for him, so the heavenly

Bridegroom of the soul is displeased with any love which has no relation to Himself. The love for Him must be the first and highest, and the reason for all other love in the soul. To seek aid, comfort or consolation from our friends without reference to Jesus, to rely on receiving these because of the love we bear to these persons and the love they return us, is, to say the least, delusive. Often we fail to respond to their best efforts to benefit us; many times, too, they fail us when we need them most, and not infrequently we lose them by death. "The love of things created is deceitful and inconstant; the love of Jesus is faithful and persevering."

What has been said thus far must not be understood as if Jesus interdicts all love for creatures. By no means, only such love is condemned which detracts from the love of Him, or is sinful either because of its excess or its wrong motive. God is love, and therefore He would have us love all things except sin. All He asks is that the love we give to creatures be in accordance with His will; in other words, that it do not usurp the love we owe Him; that not more trust be put in creatures than is put in Him, and that the super-eminence of God above His creatures be not lost sight of. "A man does himself more harm if He seek not Jesus, than the whole world and all his enemies would be able to do him."

Resolution: "Keep thyself with Jesus both in life and death, and commit thyself to His care, who alone can help thee when all others fail."

Conclusion: "O God, who hast prepared good things unseen for them that love Thee, pour into our hearts the fervor of Thy love, that, loving Thee in all things and above all things, we may obtain Thy promises, which surpass all desire." (*Missal,* Prayer for the 5th Sunday after Pentecost).

AUGUST 18

FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS

"A faithful friend is a strong defence: and he that hath found him, hath found a treasure" (Eccl. VI, 14), says Holy Writ. If this be true of human friendship, how much more must it be true when that friend is Jesus Christ! "Whosoever finds Jesus, finds a treasure; yea, good above all goods." The devout man experiences that "when Jesus is present, all goes well, and nothing seems difficult; but when Jesus is absent, everything is hard." Now we know that Jesus as God is with us as long as we are in the state of sanctifying grace; but this presence is not what we mean here; what we mean here, is a certain sensible realization of His presence as a companion and friend. Jesus' presence is felt by the spiritual joy, peace and consolation that comes into the heart of the one who is striving to love and serve Him faithfully. "When Jesus speaks not within, our comfort is worth nothing; but if Jesus speak but one word, we feel great consolation." This foretaste of Heaven in thus intimately associating with Jesus as a friend is a powerful incentive to keep one recollected, and to retain this comforting realization of His nearness.

Unless a soul be humble and peaceable, devout and quiet, Jesus' presence in this intimate manner will soon be lost. Nor will He stay with one who is much given to the love of temporal things. Sometimes He leaves us for a time to try us or to prompt a correction of what is sinful or dangerous. From some favored souls He withdraws this comfort of His presence for long periods of time, sometimes for a life-time, so that they, being faithful notwithstanding, may suffer a spiritual martyrdom and thereby gain an imperishable crown of glory. Many saints suffered excruciating physical pain,

others suffered the still more poignant pain of not tasting the sweetness of His presence in life.

Resolution: "Of all that are dear to Thee, let Jesus always be thy special beloved."

Conclusion: "O my Jesus, Thou knowest well that I love Thee, but I do not love Thee enough; O grant that I may love Thee more." (Raccolta).

AUGUST 19

FRIENDS AND FRIENDS

To say that the friendship of Jesus is exclusive does not mean that a person should have no other friends. What is meant, is, that we should have no friends who will in any way interfere with the friendship of our Lord Jesus Christ. God created man a social being, and therefore he has a natural craving for the society of others, which is in no way reprehensible as long as the laws of God are observed in gratifying this natural desire. "It is better, therefore, that two should be together, than one; for they have the advantage of their society. If one fall, he shall be supported by the other: woe to him that is alone, for when he falleth, he hath none to lift him up." (Eccles. IV, 9–10). St. Francis de Sales says in his *Introduction to a Devout Life* (c. XIX): "For those who, dwelling among worldings, desire to embrace true virtue, it is a necessity to unite themselves together by a holy and sacred friendship, since by this means they encourage, assist, and conduct each other to good. . . . In the world all are not directed by the same views, not actuated by the same spirit; we must, therefore, separate ourselves and contract friendships according to our several pretensions."

But how does this doctrine agree with the words of Christ:

"If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke XIV, 26). St. Gregory explains that the words of our Lord mean that even our nearest relations are to be cut off from our love and affection if they prove to be an obstacle in following the way of the Lord. "We ought rather to choose to have the whole world against us, than to offend Jesus." Only those, then, are to be admitted to our friendship that will aid us in furthering our friendship with Jesus.

Resolution: "For Him, and in Him, let both friends and enemies be dear to thee; and for all these must thou pray to Him, that all may know and love Him."

Conclusion: "O heavenly Father, teach me and grant me grace to love all things for Jesus' sake, but Jesus for His own sake."

AUGUST 20

PROPER APPRECIATION

A lack of appreciation of the graces bestowed by God is a fault greatly to be deplored in many Christians. They seem to think the graces which they receive are their due, and they often complain when they do not receive the grace they desire, or at the time they desire it. Moreover, they do not recognize that trials and troubles are often graces in disguise. "Give to God what is His, and take to thyself what is thine; that is, give thanks to God for His grace, but as to thyself, be sensible that nothing is to be attributed to thee but sin and the punishment due to sin."

A proper appreciation for the grace of God is shown by the gratitude which it elicits. "Be grateful then for the least, and thou shalt be worthy to receive greater things. . . . Yea,

though He give punishment and stripes, it ought to be acceptable; for whatever He suffers to befall us, He always does it for our salvation."

When we consider that every grace is a free gift of God that cannot be earned nor merited, we shall adopt a proper attitude toward God's goodness in bestowing graces upon us. "If thou considerest the dignity of the Giver, no gift will seem to thee little which is given by so great a God." The graces that will be most highly prized will be those that arouse sorrow for past sins rather than such as bring much consolation. "I will accept of that grace which makes me always more humble and fearful, and more ready to forsake myself." If God has favored me with many graces, and they have been fruitful, I will not be desirous of vainglory, but rather, like the saints, will attribute all to their proper fountainhead, God. "They who attribute to God whatever good they have received, seek not glory from one another, but that glory which is from God alone; and desire above all things that God may be praised in themselves, and in all the saints, and to this same they always tend."

Resolution: "He that desires to retain grace, let him be thankful for grace when it is given."

Conclusion: "O God, of whose mercies there is no number, and of whose goodness the treasure is infinite, we render Thee thanks for the gifts Thou hast bestowed upon us." (*Missal,* Extract from a Prayer in the Mass of Thanksgiving).

AUGUST 21

LOVE'S TEST

The test of love is suffering. He who is unwilling to suffer for Christ's sake is hardly able to say that he loves our

Saviour dearly. The symbol of suffering for the Christian is the cross. Hence our Lord says: "He that taketh not up his cross and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me." (Matt. X, 38).

It is true, the very thought of pain and suffering is abhorrent. That there should be reluctance to desire or accept suffering is readily understood when we consider the frailty and corruption brought upon human nature by the sin of our first parents. However, to take upon ourselves pain and suffering voluntarily, or to accept cheerfully what cannot be avoided, in imitation of Christ's sufferings, or in acquiescence to the will of God, is a sure proof of love for our Lord and Saviour. "All desire to rejoice with Jesus; few are willing to suffer with Him. Many follow Jesus to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the chalice of His Passion. . . . But they that love Jesus for His sake, and not for any comfort of their own, bless Him no less in tribulation and anguish of heart, than in the greatest consolation."

An encouraging fact is that, as the love for Jesus increases in the soul, the greater is that soul's willingness to suffer for Him, and the more suffering is borne for Him, the more ardent grows the desire to suffer for Him. This truth was experienced to such an extraordinary degree by St. Teresa that she wished "either to suffer for Christ or to die." The aversion of nature to suffering is strong, but the love of God is stronger and can conquer our very nature. "Oh, how much is the pure love of Jesus able to do when it is not mixed with any self-interest or self-love!"

Resolution: Deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Jesus. (Matt. XVI, 24).

Conclusion: "May the sacrifice offered Thee, O Lord, by the Passion of Thine only begotten Son, interceding for us, ever vivify and strengthen us." (*Missal,* Secret for the Votive Mass of the Passion).

AUGUST 22

THE CROSS

The Cross, the characteristic symbol of Christianity, is at the same time preeminently a sign of suffering. Every Christian has a certain amount of suffering to undergo in his life. "Dispose and order all things according as thou wilt, and as seems best to thee: and thou wilt still find something to suffer, either willingly or unwillingly, and so thou shalt still find the Cross." At one time it may be physical pain, at another mental anguish; now it may relate to our temporal welfare, then again, it may be something wholly spiritual. But come it will, to some more, to others less; each will have his share.

The important question is: How do you conduct yourselves when suffering comes? Do you try to avoid the cross? "Dost thou think to escape that which no mortal could ever avoid? What saint was there ever in the world without his cross and affliction?" Do you receive your cross unwillingly? "If thou carry it unwillingly, thou makest it a burden to thee, and loadest thyself the more; and nevertheless thou must bear it." Happy they who take up their crosses willingly, for, "if thou carry the Cross willingly, it will carry thee, and bring thee to thy desired end; to wit, to that place where there will be an end of suffering, though there will be none here." That which makes the Cross light and bearable is the thought of and love for our dear Lord and Saviour, who says: "My yoke is sweet and My burden light." (Matt. XI, 30). Light and sweet for those who love the Saviour and wish to imitate Him. "Our Lord Jesus Christ was not one hour of His life without suffering: 'It behooveth,' saith He, 'that

Christ should suffer and rise from the dead, and so enter into His glory.' And how does thou pretend to seek another way than this royal way, which is the way of the Cross?"

Resolution: "Set thyself, then, like a good and faithful servant of Christ, to bear manfully the Cross of thy Lord, crucified for the love of thee."

Conclusion: "O God, who wast pleased to sanctify the standard of the life-giving Cross with the blood of Thine only-begotten Son, grant, we beseech Thee, that those who rejoice in honoring the same holy Cross, may also everywhere rejoice in Thy protection." (*Missal,* Prayer for the Votive Mass of the Passion).

AUGUST 23

THE VALUE OF CROSSES

Those who have many crosses to bear in life may console themselves with the thought that they are favorites of God. God sends many crosses to those who will carry them for the love of Him. Those who are weak in love will be too weak to bear the burden of many crosses. "To bear the cross, to love the cross, to chastise the body, and to bring it under subjection; to flee honors, to be willing to suffer reproaches, to despise oneself, and wish to be despised; to bear all adversities and losses, and to desire no prosperity in this world, is not according to man's natural inclinations. If thou lookest upon thyself, thou canst do nothing of this of thyself. But if thou confidest in the Lord, strength will be given thee from Heaven, and the world and the flesh shall be made subject to thee."

Nature ought to be so far overcome as to make it possible to rejoice in the trials and sufferings of life, since "nothing is

more acceptable to God, nothing more wholesome for thee in this world, than to suffer willingly for Christ. . . . Would to God that thou wert worthy to suffer something for the name of Jesus! How great a glory would be laid up for thee, how great joy it would be for all the saints of God, and how great edification for thy neighbor!"

Suffering, besides being an honor from God for the patient sufferer, is an excellent means to keep man humble. He who has many trials and sufferings is not inclined to become elated over anything that proceeds from himself, for he is constantly reminded of his misery. To this advantage must be added the merit of satisfaction for sin which the Cross makes possible. Every suffering willingly and patiently borne means a remission of much of the suffering due for sin, which would otherwise have to be endured in the life to come. "To suffer, therefore, is what waits for thee, if thou wilt love Jesus, and constantly serve Him."

Resolution: "Prepare thyself to bear tribulations, and account them the greatest consolations; for the sufferings of this life bear no proportion with the glory to come, although thou alone couldst suffer them all."

Conclusion: "By the Sign of the Cross deliver us from our enemies, O God." (*Missal,* Communion for the Votive Mass of the Holy Cross).

AUGUST 24

SPIRITUAL VALUES

The farther one progresses in a devout life, the more evident it becomes day by day how the spiritual outweigh the material things in life. After having experienced the sweetness of spiritual intercourse with God, material things seem

loathsome and uninspiring. They are recognized as impediments to a union of love with God. The more zealously we aspire to live united with God, the more will the pleasures, interests, and concerns of this world be uninteresting to us. We shall desire to be loosed from the necessity of these things and wish for God and His concerns alone. "What are all temporal things but deceit? And what will all things created avail thee, if thou be forsaken by thy Creator?" Happy they who ever more and more close their ears to earthly things, so as the better to attend to heavenly things; who shut their eyes to external things, to be more attentive to the internal. "Happy they who seek to be wholly intent on God, and who rid themselves of every worldly impediment."

This detachment from worldly possessions, pleasures, and comforts can hardly be understood by the worldly-minded. They are so saturated with the things of this world that they cannot easily conceive of a substitute for them. Hence the conduct of the good and devout often seems the height of foolishness to worldlings. They cannot realize how unsatisfying and transitory are the things of this world, and what little value should be placed upon them. They are blinded by the glitter of tinsel and artificial trappings, never recognizing how unreal these things actually are. Not having a proper valuation of the spiritual, they are unable to estimate the instability of the temporal. If we have been striving for a devout life, we shall have an ever increasing appreciation of spiritual things, and we may address our souls: "Mind these things O my soul, and shut the door of thy senses, that thou mayest hear what the Lord thy God speaks within thee."

Resolution: "Cast off all earthly things and make thyself agreeable to thy Creator and faithful to Him, so that thou mayest attain to true happiness."

Conclusion: "I will hear what the Lord God speaketh to me." (Ps. LXXXIV, 9).

AUGUST 25

UNION WITH GOD

When the mind of the devout man is directed more to the spiritual than to the material, then his soul turns toward God like a flower to the sun. There is a strong attraction to God and a desire for a very intimate union with Him. By this union is not meant that general union of the soul with God resulting from sanctifying grace, "but of certain individual acts and aspirations which the recollected soul makes in prayer, the better to unite itself with His divine goodness. Assuredly there is a difference between uniting or joining one thing to another, and drawing or pressing them closely together." When detached from the things of the world, the soul has both the leisure and the inclination to live more closely with its Divine Redeemer. There may be a constant interchange of loving sentiments between the soul and God. The devout soul may exercise this means of union by frequent aspirations of love, directed to its loving Saviour, and our Blessed Lord will often speak within the soul without words. When the soul has no more desire for temporal things and takes no delight in those it possesses, except in accordance with the will of God, then God often fills that soul with His presence, without any effort on the part of the soul, aside from the soul's acquiescence and joy in having Him there. The devout disciple of the Lord may then say: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." (1 Kings III, 9). "I am Thy servant; give me understanding that I may know Thy testimonies." (Ps. CXVIII, 125). "Incline my heart to the words of Thy mouth; let Thy speech distill as the dew." Or again, the soul may draw this union by a loving will, striving to

bring it about and engaging the understanding to fix itself in strong delight on Jesus. What a loving intercourse between God and the soul when thus united with its Maker!

Resolution: "I will cast myself into the arms of Thy mercy and abide there for all eternity." (St. Francis de Sales, *Of the Love of God,* Bk. VII, c. 3).

Conclusion: My good God! "Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee. . . . Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." (Ps. LXXIII 24, 25).

AUGUST 26

COMPARISONS

"The greater number [of men] listen more willingly to the world than to God; and more readily follow the desires of the flesh than the good pleasure of God." Strange that it should be so! The world can offer only that which is transitory, whereas God offers that which is eternal. Men will obey rulers and magistrates to obtain their favor, which is but fickle and in continual danger of being lost, whereas obedience to God is sure of its lasting reward, which will endure as long as faithful service to Him is continued. Men will work and slave day by day for the acquisition of wealth, which is easily lost, and, when attained, rarely gives the satisfaction that was expected. For the treasures of the next world many are very slow to bestir themselves, and when they do, often think they are doing God a favor, yet are benefiting no one but themselves. After they have labored and toiled for a promised good of this world they are apt to be disappointed in its attainment, for when once in possession of a seeming

good, it often loses its attraction or cannot be enjoyed for some other reason.

Many a man has worked industriously for riches which, after gaining he could not enjoy for the reason that he had ruined his health in gaining it. How different with the things of God! He is, above all, true to His promises. A good which He promises, is first of all possible of attainment; it is a genuine good satisfying every desire; it is a good which lasts not only for a time, but forever. It is almost beyond comprehension that a soul, knowing God's promises, can be slothful and negligent in striving to gain the rewards which He has appointed for those who love and serve Him faithfully. Damning, indeed, are the words of Christ: "He that despiseth Me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." (John XII, 48).

Resolution: "Write my words in thy heart, and think diligently on them; for they will be very necessary in the time of temptation."

Conclusion: "Blessed is the man whom thou, O Lord, shalt instruct, and shalt teach him out of Thy law; that thou mayest give him ease from the evil days." (Ps. XCIII 12–13).

AUGUST 27

LOVE OF GOD IN TRUTH

It is marvelous how willingly and readily men will deceive themselves, even though it be to their own detriment. There are persons who try to make themselves believe that they are serving God and have reached a high degree of holiness. But

an unprejudiced consideration of their lives will stamp them as mere formalists. They have no real love of God, no genuine devotion. Their whole religion consists in being conventional. Unless we exercise caution, our religion, either entirely or in part, may be spoiled by the same fault. The love of God will not prevail in our souls unless, above all things, we are humble. Otherwise we will seek praise and admiration for the very virtues which ought to give praise to God alone. The seeming sanctity which we possess will be a source of pride for us. Therefore, we are advised to think of our sins in all humility, with great compunction and sorrow, and never to esteem ourselves for our good works. "Thou hast nothing in which thou canst glory, but much for which thou oughtest to humble thyself; for thou art much weaker than thou art able to comprehend." Surely we have no reason to glory in our virtues. Oftentimes we mistake our own interests for virtues. Or, again, our virtue has never been tried; will it be stable amidst temptations? Moreover, virtue of long standing may be entirely lost in an instant by the commission of one mortal sin. One mortal sin can start the trail of sins which constitutes vice, the opposite of virtue. "Of thyself thou always tendest to nothing, thou quickly fallest, thou art quickly overcome and easily disturbed." Others who are not even in the state of grace, deceive themselves in believing that they are serving God when they perform outward works of devotion, they only carry their devotion in their books, in pictures, and in outward signs and figures. They have God in their mouths, but not in their hearts.

Resolve to walk before God in truth, and always to seek Him in the simplicity of thy heart.

Conclusion: "Lord! let Thy truth teach me, let Thy truth guard me, and keep me till I come to a happy end."

AUGUST 28

OUR HONOR

Perhaps we have never seen it in this light, nevertheless it is true that to love God is our greatest honor. By being allowed to honor God we ourselves are very much honored. In the Middle Ages, the times of the brilliant courts of the ruling kings and princes, those who were appointed to wait upon the king and queen were chosen from the noble families, who would vie with one another for the honor. To be the page of a queen was an honor to be sought, and to obtain the position was considered a favor. How much greater is the honor intimately to serve the King of kings! How marvelous to consider that in this service we are not in the position of a servant, but of a friend! Surely God has highly favored those whom He calls to His love. In His love we at times receive the endearments lavished by an indulgent Father upon His child. "O Father of mercies and God of all comfort, I give thanks to Thee, who sometimes art pleased to cherish with Thy consolation me that am unworthy of all comfort."

It is only because of a weakness caused by the passions that this great honor of loving God is not properly appreciated. "Because I am as yet weak in love and imperfect in virtue, therefore do I stand in need of being comforted and strengthened by Thee. For this reason visit me often, and instruct me in Thy holy discipline. Free me from evil passions, and heal my mind from all disorderly affections; that being healed and well purified in my interior, I may become fit to love, courageous to suffer, and constant to per-

severe." Passing strange that we need to ask God to help us to love Him properly, when He is love itself. Yet despite good will we are weak, and He alone can help us.

Resolution: "I bless Thee, O heavenly Father, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, because Thou hast been mindful of so poor a wretch as I am."

Conclusion: "O God, my holy Lover, when Thou shalt come into my heart, all that is within me shall be filled with joy."

AUGUST 29

LOVE'S LABOR

Love of God is the motive power for a devout and zealous life in the service of God. The love of God makes all things easy; burdens are lightened, hardships are sweetened, great things are undertaken, and the more perfect is striven after. "Love feels no burden, values no labors, would willingly do more than it can; complains not of impossibility, because it conceives that it may and can do all things. It is able, therefore, to do anything, and it performs and effects many things, where he that loves not faints and lies down." Love is swift; no sooner is the will of God recognized, than the soul moves to fulfill it. Love is sincere; there is no thought to deceive the Beloved, even if that were possible. Love is pious; its first and most eager attention is always to Almighty God. Love is pleasant; there are no joys in life comparable with the joys of supernatural love. It is delightful, for the charms of God's love in return are most satisfying to the soul. Love is strong, patient, and faithful, enduring all trials lovingly, uncomplainingly and loyally. Love is prudent and courageous, and never seeks itself, attempting all things and yet using discretion by seeking ever to con-

form to the will of God without any thought of self; "for where a man seeks himself, there he falls from love." Love is circumspect, humble and upright, cautiously respecting the rights of every man, not desiring to be elevated above them and always meeting them with the utmost candor and truthfulness. Love is not soft, not light, not intent upon vain things, never sensuous, never frivolous, never filled with vanity. On the contrary, "love is sober, chaste, stable, quiet, and keeps a guard over all the senses." Finally, "love is submissive and obedient to superiors; in its own eyes mean and contemptible; devout and thankful to God, always trusting and hoping in Him, even when it tastes not the relish of God's sweetness, for there is no living in love without some pain or sorrow."

Resolution: "Let me love Thee more than myself, and myself only for Thee."

Conclusion: "Jesus, be my Love!"

AUGUST 30

LOVE'S TRIAL

One of the severest trials of the genuineness of our love of God is our conduct in sickness. When a man is disabled by sickness or accident, becoming almost entirely dependent upon those about him, then, if ever, his love of God is on trial, and it can be seen whether he will kiss the hand that afflicts him. To be patient, uncomplaining, and considerate are virtues easily practiced in health, but in time of sickness they are very difficult. Those who are seldom sick, find it difficult to accept their trials with patience and resignation. At such a time to accept all that is sent by almighty God with patience, not to complain at being unable to do active work

for His honor, to be satisfied to receive acts of charity from our neighbor rather than to perform them ourselves, requires true love of God. Under these circumstances, to pray or, what is more often the case, not to be able to pray, even though we wish to, is worth more than hours of prayer in time of health. To be ready to confess and to receive Holy Communion as frequently as possible, despite the absence of any inclination to do so, is loving our dear Lord far more than frequently to receive Holy Communion when consoled by His love. To be urged to frequent the sacraments as often as given opportunity, urged on by faith rather than by sentiment, is a stronger sign of love than to receive God because of a longing for the sacrament. In a word, to do what we know God asks of us, not prompted by feeling, is very pleasing to God, especially when our inclination and physical state are not propitious for such good works. It is love for God in a degree far excelling that shown in health in performing more difficult good works. Not to sin when suffering such lassitude and weakness as are present in sickness, requires a stronger love of God than in health.

Resolution: In health, pray for spiritual strength in time of sickness.

Conclusion: "If whole armies should stand against me, my heart shall not fear. The Lord is my Helper and my Redeemer." (Ps. LXIX, 6).

AUGUST 31

LOVE AND HUMILITY

Those permitted to love a person of high degree with an intimate affection feel highly honored, just so those souls who are allowed to love with an intimate friendship the

blessed Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, are thereby highly favored. This fact, however, ought not to incline the soul to pride. The joy, sensible devotion, and fervor that attend this love of our Saviour, are His free gift, and not in any way earned by us. Even more meritorious is a love that is loyal and faithful without these helps. Hence, "It is more profitable and safer to hide the grace of devotion, and not to be elated by it, not to speak much of it, not to consider it much; but rather to despise oneself the more, and to be afraid of it, as if given to one unworthy." Nor is it a sign of true humility, if, when these aids to the love of God are missing, the soul grows impatient and slothful, dejected and discouraged. The humble man knows that he has no right to these signs of endearment from our Lord and is totally undeserving of them. It belongs to God to comfort whom He will, when He will, as much as He will, as it shall please Him, and no more. And it is a true sign of humility if the soul neither expects nor desires too eagerly the comforts of God's love and is willing to love Him, as it were, from a distance. "If thou couldst but always continue humble and little in thy eyes, and keep thy spirit in due order and subjection, thou wouldst not so easily fall into danger and offence." As the child much favored and singled out for benefits, often loses appreciation for the giver whilst clinging to the gifts, so we, too, unless we have true humility, may be apt to look upon the comforts from God as our due and in time prize sensible devotion more than we do the Giver. We must accordingly acknowledge ourselves unworthy of this grace, and if it is given us, act cautiously, lest we prize it more than the bountiful Giver.

Resolution: "Thou must not depend too much on this affection, which may be quickly changed into the contrary," spiritual dryness.

Conclusion: "O Jesus, be Thou my love!"

SEPTEMBER 1

LOVE'S EFFECT IN THE HUMBLE

After a deliberate consideration of the value of man in the sight of God, each one of us must confess: "I am but dust and ashes," (Gen. XVIII, 27). When man begins to estimate his worth, he finds that he has nothing from himself; his body, his soul, his training, and his virtue are totally, or in great part, the work of others. Of one thing only is he the sole author, that is, his sins. O God! what a nought is man, and he knows it not. "But if I humble myself, and acknowledge my own nothingness, and cast away all manner of esteem of myself, and (as I really am) account myself to be mere dust, Thy grace will be favorable to me, and Thy light will draw nigh to my heart; and all self-esteem, how small soever, will be sunk in the depth of my own nothingness, and there lose itself forever." As the flower without moisture will soon droop, so must my soul soon lose all spiritual vitality unless the dew of God's love refreshes and strengthens me. "It is very wonderful that I am so quickly raised up, and so graciously embraced by Thee; I who by my own weight am always sinking to the bottom."

It is God's love that effects the assistance we need in our necessities, the protection needed in the many and grievous dangers that assail us, the desire and courage to follow the path of virtue, the joy and consolation in our love of Him. It is God's love that gives us all we have, material and spiritual; our share in them is merely a co-operation in God's plan of giving. Hence a man's merits are to be estimated "by his being grounded in true humility and replenished with divine charity; by his seeking always purely and entirely the

honor of God; by his esteeming himself to be nothing, and sincerely despising himself; and being better pleased to be despised and humbled by others, than to be the object of their esteem."

Resolution: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

Conclusion: "Blessed be Thou, O my God! for though I am unworthy of all good, yet Thy generosity and infinite goodness never cease to do good, even to those who are ungrateful, and are turned away from Thee."

SEPTEMBER 2

GOD OUR ALL

The soil of the earth has no warmth, no vivifying strength, and no beauty without the light and heat of the sun. So, too, our souls have no fervor, no power for good, and no beauty without God. "Consider all things as flowing from the Sovereign Good; and therefore they must all be returned to Him as to their origin." From Him the saint and the sinner, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the lowly, all have whatever they possess. "Therefore, thou must not ascribe anything of good to thyself, nor attribute virtue to any man; but give all to God without whom man is nothing."

This conviction leads first of all to gratitude towards God. He expects that we thank Him for all His blessings and favors. As soon as a man ceases to be grateful, he loses many of the graces he would otherwise receive, whereas gratitude brings many other graces in the wake of those already received. The truth that everything comes from God also helps to banish vainglory, for what has man to glory in if he is convinced that he is what he is, and has what he has from

God. Moreover, this truth does away with envy, for who will envy his neighbor his spiritual goods when he knows that they were given him by God? It is for God to give to whom He pleases and in what measure He pleases. The will of God alone should be done, and whether I be the instrument or another, matters little, for that rests entirely with Him.

Such are the thoughts and sentiments prompted by the love of God. The sun shines upon the weeds and the flowers, and yet it works out to a good end; so God's plans, whether connected with me or with another, all work out for His greater honor and glory, which should be the one wish and desire of my heart.

Resolution: Refer all things to God, for it is He that has given thee all.

Conclusion: "My God and my all!"

SEPTEMBER 3

LOVE AND SERVICE

St. Francis de Sales writes in his book *Of the Love of God:* "The soul is the motive power of all man's vital movements; Aristotle says that it is the principle by which we live, feel and understand. Hence it follows that these movements, in their diversity, are the expression of our various kinds of life, and where there is no natural movement, there is no life. So love is the motive power of that spiritual life by which we live, move, and feel; and our spiritual life will be whatever the movements of our affections are." In language less philosophical the Saint says that our service of God will be what our love for Him is. The love of God is the principle of action as well as the motive for the service of God. The motive of fear may drive a soul to serve God, but if it be a

servile fear, the service will be confined only to that which is absolutely necessary to avoid punishment; if on the other hand it be a filial fear, it partakes of the nature of the love of God. "Oh, how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for those that fear Thee!" (Ps. XXX, 20). But what art Thou to those who love Thee? What to those who serve Thee with their whole heart? The service of God is sweet because based on love. It affords pleasure to serve those whom we love. It is easy to serve those who love us, for the tasks asked of us will be considerate, as light as possible, and entirely proportionate to our strength. Hence love of our Master will prompt a service that is quick, ready, and willing. Rather than to think that we are doing a favor to God by our service, we shall consider it a favor from Him to be allowed to do so. "Can it be much to serve Thee, whom the whole creation is bound to serve? It ought not to seem much to me to serve Thee: but this should seem rather great and wonderful to me, that Thou vouchsafest to receive me, so wretched and unworthy, into Thy service, and to associate me with Thy beloved servants."

Resolve to keep His commandments, for this is the charity of God. (Cf. John V, 3).

Conclusion: "O God! that I were able, if it were but for one day, to serve Thee worthily!"

SEPTEMBER 4

NOT SERVANTS, BUT FRIENDS

It is our task to serve God in this life, so that we may gain the eternal reward of Heaven. But our Lord does not on that account treat us as servants, but rather as friends.

Everything has been done to make this service easy. The heavens and the earth were made for man to help him serve the Almighty. Even the angels were given to man to aid him in the service of his Master. And, finally, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity Himself came upon earth, to become, we might say, the servant of man in the service of His heavenly Father. Truly man may say to God: "Thou rather servest me than I Thee."

The service of God, too, has much of its reward already in this life. A reward that is seldom withheld by God for faithful service is a serene, spiritual peace and a holy consolation; "for they who willingly subject themselves to God's most holy service, shall have a great grace. They who for the love of Thee have cast away all carnal delight shall find the most sweet consolation of the Holy Ghost."

To obtain these effects, however, our service must be that of a friend rather than of a servant. It must be characterized by loyalty, detachment from things of this world, sacrifice of the lawful at times for the sake of God. Its motive should be the love we bear to an indulgent Master, rather than any reward offered for faithful service. Ours ought to be the service of a loving child to a dear father, rather than that of a hireling to his employer. Such service becomes pleasant and delightful because it is the service of a friend to a friend. Thus do the angels serve God, and a similar service from man raises him in dignity only a little below the angels. "O service, worthy to be embraced and always to be wished for, which leads to the supreme Good, and procures a joy that will never end!"

Reslove to serve God with all thy strength and never grow weary in His service.

Conclusion: "Oh, that I could serve Thee all the days of my life!"

SEPTEMBER 5

MODERATION

The principle that must be followed if we truly love God, is to conform our wills to His in all things. In our thoughts, in our words, in our desires and actions, we must wish, think, speak, desire, and do only what is the will of God. Therefore, the desires of our hearts must be examined and, if necessary, moderated, lest they diverge from the will of God. "If thou hast no other view than Me, thou wilt be well contented with whatever I shall ordain; but if there lurk in thee anything of self-seeking, behold this it is that hinders thee and troubles thee."

It is natural for man to have desires and to seek to further them. The love of God bids us banish them, unless they can be brought into conformity with the will of God. Often they are in conformity with His will, or may easily be modified to become so. "Even in good desires and inclinations, it is expedient sometimes to use restraint, lest by too much eagerness thou incur distraction of mind; lest thou create scandal to others, by not keeping within discipline; or by the opposition which thou mayest meet with from others, thou be suddenly disturbed and fall."

St. Francis de Sales illustrates what is meant by saying: "For instance, when parents need their children to support or attend them, it is not the time to follow the counsel of retiring from the world, since charity bids a man rather obey the commandment, 'Honor thy father and mother.' A prince on whose posterity his country depends for lawful government, may not seek a life of celibacy. He, who is in fragile health, needing care and comfort, has no right to seek volun-

tary poverty; neither is it lawful for the father of a family to sell all he has and leave his wife and children unprovided for." (*Of the Love of God,* Bk. VIII, c. 6). "For every inclination which appears good is not presently to be followed; nor every contrary affection at first sight to be rejected."

Resolution: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven."

Conclusion: O Jesus, who didst pray to Thy heavenly Father: "Not my will but thine be done," grant us ever to conform our will with Thine.

SEPTEMBER 6

SENSUALITY

There are those, not very experienced in spiritual life, who are surprised that there is a continual strife and struggle in the soul of man, never allowing a lasting and satisfying peace. They forget that, owing to the sin of Adam, there is a conflict between the body and the soul which will end only when there is a complete victory for the one or the other, and this will be undecided until the moment of death, for until that time the body will allow the soul no peace and will ever renew the attack. The body fights for the things that satisfy the senses, such as luxury, comfort, ease, and carnal pleasure. The soul strives for what satisfies the soul, the love of God and the love of one's neighbor for the sake of God, purity and innocence, good works to please the Divine Master. Since the desires of the body and of the soul are opposed to each other, to satisfy the one means to reject the other. Hence this continual conflict, which alas, owing to man's greater inclination to evil than to good, in the majority of

men, results in concessions to the body which are detrimental, if not ruinous, to the spiritual life of the soul. This harm to the soul may be suffered, even though the indulgence be not sinful, but if sinful, the harm is incalculable. Mindful of this truth, an anonymous writer indites the following prayerful sentiments: "Jesus, I am weighed down to earth by a disease which Thou alone canst heal. I love the things of earth more than Thee. I love the things of sense. I am gross and carnal. I am more an animal than a man. Thou hast created me to live with Thyself and the angels. Thou hast made me for Heaven and eternity, and I love earth and time. O Jesus, who lovest me so much, . . . heal me, that I may go through life with my face to the stars, not grovelling in the slime of sensuality."

Resolution: "Go not after thy lusts, but turn away from thy own will." (Ecclus. XVIII, 30).

Conclusion: "Almighty and merciful God, in Thy loving kindness do Thou keep us from all things that war against us, so that, being unhampered alike in soul and body, we may with free minds perform the works that are Thine."

SEPTEMBER 7

OBEDIENCE

"If a man doth not freely and willingly submit himself to his superior, it is a sign that his flesh is not as yet perfectly obedient to him, but oftentimes rebels and murmurs."

We all have lawful superiors to obey, be they the rulers of our country, or those in authority in the Church, or, more directly, our spiritual directors. Not to obey in all that is right, reasonable, and just, plainly discloses that the soul,

which we suppose is striving for perfection, is not in full control of the sensual inclinations of the body, which murmurs when something goes counter to its likes or dislikes. The soul, being governed by reason, can force it to do that which, though distasteful, is known to be pleasing to God. The body, governed by the blind desires of the senses, unless guided or restrained by the soul, will embrace only what is consonant with the senses. "There is no more troublesome or worse enemy to the soul than thou art thyself, when not agreeing well with the spirit." Until the body is brought under subjection to the soul, a man will find it difficult to subjugate himself to the will of another by obedience.

Difficult as it may at times seem, no one will question the necessity of obedience to lawful authorities. What is more, it can be practiced, despite the sluggishness of man's inferior faculties. Despite the repugnance of these same faculties, "learn to submit thyself readily to thy superior, if thou desirest to subdue thy flesh." If you need courage and strength for such a course of action, look to your Divine Saviour. "What great matter is it, if thou who art but dust and a mere nothing, submit thyself for God's sake to man; when I, the Almighty and the Most High, who created all things out of nothing, have for thy sake humbly subjected Myself to man. . . . Because thou hast yet too inordinate a love for thyself, therefore art thou afraid to resign thyself wholly to the will of others."

Resolve to "learn to break thy will and to yield thyself up to all subjection."

Conclusion: "Be merciful, we beseech Thee, O Lord, to Thy people, that, rejecting the things which please Thee not, we may rather be filled with the delights of Thy commandments." (Prayer over the people on Friday of Passion Week).

SEPTEMBER 8

FEAR AND HOPE

Concupiscence is strong in man, and at times nothing but the dire threat of God's punishments will act as a deterrent to satisfy its demands. At other times courage only is necessary. The love of God alone is not enough to restrain those who, weakened by many sins, or lax and languid in the service of God, or lacking energy and strength because they are in the talons of luxury. They have little love of God in their hearts, and, what is even more alarming, little possibility in the condition they are in of arousing any. For them only God's punishments staring them in the face will be effective in offering a motive for restraining themselves. If they heed the warning, then the love of God again has a chance of becoming the motive for conquering their passions.

When we consider, that this spiritual languor is or may become our state of soul, then we, too, need the prod of the fear of God to go on and to fight, to overcome ourselves, and to take up our cross and follow Christ. If we are humble, we will acknowledge that there is no sanctity in us, if the Lord withdraw His hand from us. Rightfully may we say: "No wisdom avails, if Thou, O Lord, ceasest to govern us. No strength is of any help, if Thou supportest us not. No chastity is secure without Thy protection. No guard that we can keep upon ourselves will profit us, if Thy providence watch not over us."

How can man succeed with so much to contend against? Only with the help of the Lord. And is this help forthcoming? "He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up

for us all, how hath He not also, with Him given us all things?" As St. Paul says: "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." (2 Cor. IV, 16).

Resolve to say often: "In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded." (Ps. XXX, 2).

Conclusion: "The Lord is my strength and my praise, and He is become salvation to me: He is my God and I will glorify Him." (Exodus XV, 2).

SEPTEMBER 9

HOLY INDIFFERENCE

When we have succeeded in our spiritual life to such a degree as to be able to be indifferent to what God is pleased to will for us, as to what we may possess, where we are to live, and what we are to do, then, indeed, we have, in large measure, brought our bodies under the control of the soul. Such indifference does not proceed from a fatalistic tendency, which reasons that no matter what we do, our fate is fixed and what is to happen cannot be avoided. Holy indifference proceeds from a wonderful trust in the providence and love of God for man. It does not at all preclude having our desires for material things as well as for the spiritual, but subordinates all these to the holy will of God. The soul possessing it is always in the disposition of wanting only that the will of God be done in all things. In prayer this soul petitions, "Give what Thou wilt, how much Thou wilt, and at what time Thou wilt." There is ever the thought in mind that God knows what is best for us and is graciously willing to give it, provided only that we ask and leave the rest to Him. There is also a certain sense of diffidence in our asking, as we must

well know "that not every desire is from the Holy Ghost, though it seem to man right and good."

As in prayer so also with other concerns; a good man knows that, leaving himself entirely and unreservedly in the hands of God, even from a human standpoint, is the most expedient for him. By so doing, he excludes so many of the worries and anxieties which rob a man of his peace of mind. When viewed spiritually, he sees that no one can or will take better care of him than God, if only he wants it and unfalteringly trusts in Him. Hence he may confidently say: "Put me where Thou wilt, and do with me in all things according to Thy will."

Resolution: Always will and desire that which is most acceptable to God, and which pleases Him most.

Conclusion: "Lo, Lord, I am Thy servant, ready to obey Thee in all things; for I do not desire to live for myself, but for Thee; oh, that I could do so after a faithful and perfect manner."

SEPTEMBER 10

HUMAN COMFORT

The senses demand to be gratified, but even when all their demands have been fulfilled, there is no satisfying sense of comfort and enjoyment for any length of time. A frequently reiterated pleasure cloys and disgusts. We tire of it. We fear that we shall not be able to enjoy it long enough or to its full extent, or that it will come to an end too soon. There seems always to be something which does not allow full enjoyment or a contented comfort.

The reason is that we were not created for this world, but for God and Heaven, and until we rest safely in His arms, we can never have a fully satisfying content and comfort, no matter how much the senses may promise them under the

delusion that in the satisfaction of the cravings of the body happiness may be found.

Let temporal things serve your use. Admire the beauties of nature and art, enjoy the innocent pleasures of mind and of the senses, but do not set your soul on them, nor use them excessively. "If thou desirest too inordinately these present things, thou wilt lose those that are heavenly and everlasting. In your use of them, make them serve a double purpose, to afford natural pleasure, if you will, but also to lead you and to fix you more firmly in the desire of the supernatural. When the allurement to seek human ease and comfort becomes strong and hard to repel, remember that you cannot be fully satisfied with any temporal goods, because you were not created for the enjoyment of such things."

Moreover, you may recall and say to yourself: "If I should have all the comforts of this world, and might enjoy all its delights, it is certain they could not last long." Bring yourself to that state of mind where you can truthfully say: "Whatsover I can desire or imagine for my comfort, I look not for it in this life, but hereafter."

Resolve to "let temporal things serve thy use, but the eternal be the object of thy desire."

Conclusion: "My God and my all."

SEPTEMBER 11

TRUST IN GOD

Being the children of Adam, we must suffer the temporal punishments of original sin, just as for the same reason we partake of the fruits of the Redemption. Hence we may never expect to be entirely free from concupiscence, one of the punishments meted out to Adam for his sin. The fight against concupiscence, is irksome, although not con-

tinuous; nevertheless, the temptations from this source are ever and ever recurring, and these repeated assaults are apt to cause confusion and anxiety.

Under these circumstances there is need for great confidence in God. We are children of Adam by reason of his being our progenitor, we are made children of God by the sacrament of Baptism. We are thereby made partakers of the blessings of God gained by the new Adam, our Divine Saviour, and due to His grace we have a supernatural power to overcome concupiscence. We must trust firmly in Christ to share His grace, which places the balance of power in our possession. We ought in temptation, therefore lovingly to say to Christ: "If Thou wilt have me to be in darkness, be Thou blessed; if Thou wilt have me to be in light, be Thou again blessed; if Thou vouchsafe to comfort me, be Thou blessed; and if it be Thy will I should be afflicted, be Thou equally blessed." To surrender ourselves confidently to our dear Saviour is the best recipe for grace against sin. "Lord, I will suffer willingly for Thee whatsoever Thou art pleased to let befall me; I will receive with indifference from Thy hand good and evil, sweet and bitter, joy and sorrow; and will give Thee thanks for all that happens to me."

Resolve to pray often: "Keep me from all sin, and I will fear neither death nor hell."

Conclusion: "O God! cast me not off forever, nor blot me out of the book of life; and what tribulation soever befalleth me shall not hurt me."

SEPTEMBER 12

PATIENCE IN STRIFE

Under the stress of frequent fighting against concupiscence there is great need of patience. The chief incentive for bear-

ing all patiently, and courageously fighting the good fight, is example. Rightly may we say: "Lord, because Thou wast patient in Thy life-time, in this chiefly fulfilling the commandment of Thy Father, it is fitting that I, a wretched sinner, should, according to Thy will, take all with patience, and as long as Thou pleasest support the burden of this corruptible life, in order to my salvation."

We have to fight against the various and often repeated promptings of concupiscence. Man would rise above his nature and live a life almost angelic but for the corruption of his nature, hampering him, holding him back, and making him wrest from his body the advantages for his soul which he wishes to attain. It is this that makes life burdensome, that makes man sigh for Heaven, where there will be no continual contention between soul and body.

This continual reminder of our human frailty is well calculated to keep a man humble. St. Paul assures us of this When he says: "Lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me. For which thing thrice I besought the Lord, that it might depart from me. And He said to me: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity." (2 Cor. XII, 7–9). Hence, "though this present life be burdensome, yet it is now become, through God's grace, very meritorious; and by the help of His example and the footsteps of His saints, more supportable to the weak, and more lightsome." Patience then in the irksome duty of repeatedly repelling the promptings of concupiscence, and of perhaps at times failing and being required to repair the harm done ourselves by the fall, is not only a means to possess our souls in peace, but of acquiring great merit as well.

Resolution: "By holy patience, walk on to Jesus, who is your crown."

Conclusion: "O Jesus, give me patience."

SEPTEMBER 13

ENCOURAGEMENT

When tempted to impatience because of the irksomeness of frequently being forced to fight the promptings of corrupt nature, let us consider how small our temptations are, as a rule, in comparison with those of others. "What thou sufferest is but little in comparison to them who have suffered so much, who have been so strongly tempted, so grievously afflicted, so many ways tried and exercised." Our little trials fade to insignificance when compared to the sufferings of the martyrs, the perseverance of the confessors, and the fidelity of the virgins, honored by God and the Church. In comparison with the trials of our dear Lord and Saviour, which, although they were of a different nature, were none the less burdensome, our little struggles are as nothing. Surely then, "thou must call to mind the heavy sufferings of others, that thou mayest the more easily bear the little things thou sufferest." Besides, "nothing, however little, that is suffered for God's sake, can pass without merit in the sight of God."

Now it is a principle which cannot be denied, that what has been done by others with the aid of God's grace, can also be done by us, with the help of grace. Therefore we, too, if we have good will, can overcome ourselves, and especially as our trials are incomparably smaller. When the reward is contemplated and the loyalty thus shown to God is considered, there ought to be no other incentive necessary for patiently bearing what cannot be avoided. The opposition necessary to one's sinful inclinations is well worth while, the more so as indulgence, besides rendering us disloyal to God,

is calculated to make us unhappy even in this life, for a man is never less a man than when he succumbs to the weaknesses of his nature.

Resolution: "Be prepared to fight, if thou desirest to gain the victory."

Conclusion: "May Thy grace, O Lord, make that possible to me which seems impossible by nature."

SEPTEMBER 14

THE WORLDLY SOUL

Enticed by the allurements of the world, many a soul departs from the path of virtue. The deceits and vanity of the world are followed though recognized; in fact, "many blame the world that it is deceitful and vain, yet they are not willing to quit it, because the concupiscence of the flesh too much prevails." They realize either from observation or from their own personal experience that the sinful pleasure of the world is followed by remorse, misery, and pain; still, despite this knowledge worldlings are so entangled or so weak as not to be able to loose themselves from its snares. By subtle reasoning they seek to justify their following after worldly pleasures, yet knowing these same pleasures will bring them only misery in the end. They imagine the phantom delights just within grasp, so they continue on deluded, although realizing that they have never yet enjoyed an unalloyed pleasure from a sinful source. "But alas! the pleasures of sin prevail over the worldly soul, and under these thorns she thinks there are delights; because she has neither seen nor tasted the sweetness of God, nor the internal pleasure of virtue."

The souls so deluded are to be pitied. Misery, shame, and trouble are their share in this world, although they may have

wealth, position, and fame, and in the next world there is little joy to be expected, as the time allotted for the gaining of riches for Heaven was misappropriated in the gaining of earthly things. "Poor, blind, worldly souls that cannot see, what kind of life this is, where afflictions and miseries are never wanting, where all things are full of snares and enemies" Only a special grace of God can make them change their ways. Truly blessed are they who have never succumbed to the world's enticements!

Resolution: Acknowledge to the Lord your weakness and the danger to which you are exposed.

Conclusion: "Strengthen me, O Lord, with heavenly fortitude, lest the old man, the miserable flesh, not fully subject to the spirit, prevail and get the upper hand, against which we must fight as long as we breathe in this most wretched life."

SEPTEMBER 15

DETACHMENT FROM SELF

When will that happy time come when we shall detach ourselves entirely from self and live for God alone? Concupiscence will still be present even then, but because we seek no gratification of our personal desires, it can but weakly influence our thought and action. The soul may, indeed, sigh for so happy a state and say: "When shall I fully recollect myself in Thee, that through the love of Thee I may not feel myself, but Thee alone, above all feeling and measure?"

Let no one think that this is impossible. St. Paul was able to say after having progressed in spiritual life: "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. II, 20). Until there is such union with God, there can be no true rest for the

soul, "because the heart cannot truly rest nor be entirely contented, till it rest in God and rise above all His gifts and all created things." This union with God must be sought by the devout soul and can be brought about only after dying to oneself and striving to live for God alone. Having renounced all thought of self, the soul may then confidently go to God and beg the grace of this union with Him. He on His part is willing and eager to take the soul into His loving embrace. It is as though He were to say to the soul: "Behold, here I am; behold I come to Thee, because thou hast called upon Me. Thy tears, and the desire of thy soul, thy humiliation and contrition of heart, have inclined and brought Me to thee."

Our renunciation, however, must be sincere and lasting. Unless it is sincere the Divine Spouse of the soul will not come; unless lasting, He will not stay. Is not the gain worth the price? We detach ourselves from self, which causes us some trouble and anxiety, but we unite ourselves with God, who gives us peace and happiness. "Come; for without Thee I can never have one joyful day nor hour; for Thou art my joy, and without Thee my table is empty."

Resolution: "Above all things, and in all things, do thou, my soul, rest always in the Lord, for He is the eternal rest of the saints."

Conclusion: "O Lord, I have called upon Thee, and have desired to enjoy Thee, and am ready to renounce all other things for Thee."

SEPTEMBER 16

GRACES GIVEN

One of the most mystifying ways of God's providence is the liberality with which He gives graces, and the infinite

variety of graces which He bestows upon the children of men. To some He gives a flood of His graces, to others He gives less copiously,—but to all sufficient, nay, more than sufficient. This fact sometimes gives occasion to those less favored to envy their seemingly more fortunate brethren. "But he that has received fewer gifts must not be troubled, nor take it ill, nor envy him that is more enriched; but attend rather to God, and very much praise His goodness, for that He bestows His graces so plentifully, so freely and willingly, without respect to persons. Because one obtains more gifts of God than another, does not make him the better. He that has received greater things cannot glory in His own merit, nor extol himself above others, nor exult over the lesser; because he is indeed greater and better who attributes less to himself, and is more humble and devout in returning thanks." It is for each man to make the best use of those graces which he has received, and to be very grateful to the good Father in Heaven for them, for every grace is a free gift from God. In faithfully co-operating with the graces received and through the merit of gratitude he may far outstrip him who has received more graces.

But even though this were not the case, it would be wrong to question the goodness and providence of God in distributing His graces. He might ask us as He did the laborers in the parable: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will? Is thy eye evil because I am Good?" (Matt. XX, 15). Let us rather say to God: "Thou knowest what is fit to be given to every one; and why this person hath less, and the other more, is not our business to decide, but thine, who keepest an exact account of the merits of each one."

Resolve to rejoice in nothing so much as in the accomplishment of the will of God in yourself, and the pleasure of His eternal appointment.

Conclusion: "Give me grace, O Lord, to understand Thy

will, and to commemorate with great reverence all Thy benefits, in general as in particular."

SEPTEMBER 17

PEACE

Peace in the spiritual sense may be defined as a quietness and serenity of soul, not disturbed by thoughts of anxiety, remorse, discontent or fear. A state of peace ought to be the ordinary lot of a soul redeemed by Christ, for He is the Prince of Peace. He was announced by the angels at His birth as the bearer of peace to men of good will, and He Himself said that He would leave His peace with the Apostle after His death.

As with all things else, in order to obtain this peace, it is necessary to have a receptacle empty and ready to receive it. In our case, it is the heart which must be disposed and prepared to obtain the peace of God. To obtain it and to keep it there must be a state of soul which makes peace both possible and genuine. This disposition of the soul is present when a man seeks to fulfill the counsels of Christ, as spoken in *The Following of Christ*. "Endeavor, my son," says He, "rather to do the will of another than thy own. Always wish and pray that the will of God may entirely be fulfilled in thee." Unless the soul is striving for these perfections, even though the success of earnest efforts be rather negligible, there can be little thought of peace, for a soul not empty enough of self to seek after these virtues, is of necessity cluttered up with other things, which leave no room for genuine spiritual peace.

The man who is honest with himself will need to confess that as often as he is disquieted and disturbed, it is because

he has strayed from this doctrine. The conqueror in a war may be willing not only to make peace, but even to proffer peace to the conquered. If the latter, however, is arrogant, insubordinate, and obstinate, no peace is possible, because the state of mind necessary of an acceptance of peace is wanting, and if peace is made, it is but a sham and will not last. Similarly with the soul: where there is no disposition for peace, there can be no peace, except a sham peace neither satisfying nor lasting.

Resolve to follow Christ's counsels and you will not easily be troubled.

Conclusion: "Our Lady, Queen of Peace, pray for us."

SEPTEMBER 18

EVIL THOUGHTS

The imagination of man is ever active. It has the power of forming mental pictures at random, and this is done even in sleep. It is like an irresponsible child that can be held within bounds only by coercion. The will must act as the master of the imagination. The first mental pictures in the fancy may be entirely unprovoked as far as the will of man is concerned. Once shown by the imagination, they may be fostered and delighted in, provided that the will is inclined to allow their presence and the pleasure they may afford. Many such pictures, some good, others evil, come to the imagination. The latter may be fancied wrongs, fancied pleasures, fancied fears and such like, which have their influence on the soul. At times they come in great numbers, then again the same one persistently returns. The frightened soul may well cry out: "O Lord, My God! depart not far from me, for divers evil thoughts have risen up against me,

and great fears, afflicting my soul. How shall I pass without hurt? How shall I break through them?" This condition of mind is apt to rob us of its peace. Now, the truth is, no thought nor number of thoughts, no matter how sinful can harm the soul if not willingly caused and indulged in by the individual. When arising from the unassisted fancy they cannot be sin, no matter how numerous or persistent, if the will is displeased with them and seeks to replace them by innocent thoughts.

The best strategy on the part of the one who is thus attacked, is ejaculatory prayer, distracting the mind to something else, concentrating upon some absorbing work, totally expelling fear and worry, and making the firm resolution with God's aid never to take pleasure in what is sinful. Much of the fear and anxiety consequent upon temptations of this nature would be avoided were this latter mode of resistance to be adopted. Anxiety brings confusion, and confusion destroys the peace of mind so desirable for a devout life.

Resolution: Understand, then resist without fear.

Conclusion: "Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee."

SEPTEMBER 19

GOOD THOUGHTS

Professional men think of things in terms of their profession. A medical man thinks from a medical viewpoint, the lawyer from the legal. So, too, the thoughts of the devout man are colored by the religious viewpoint. The more we strive to lead a religious life, the more our thoughts are concentrated on things religious, the less is the chance of the mind being overrun with evil thoughts, for the former deny

admittance to the latter; the good repel the bad; both cannot be present at the same time. As a rule, those thoughts gain the ascendancy that are preponderantly in the mind; if the intellect is customarily occupied with good thoughts, the victory will go to virtue; if frequently engaged in evil thoughts, the victory will be with sin. Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God, consequently in prayer the mind is preeminently engaged in good thoughts, and those who pray much, leave little room in their minds for evil thoughts to make an attack upon them. He who prays much and fervently, will look to God for help against his own thoughts. Often may he say: "Restrain my wandering thoughts, O good Jesus, and oppose the temptations that violently assault me. Fight strongly for me, and overcome these wicked beasts, may the abundance of Thy praise resound in Thy holy court, which is a clean conscience."

Together with prayer, a conscious effort, as far as that may be combined with our duties of life, to keep our thoughts in union with God, His saints, and holy things, will not only be a practice of a great virtue, but at the same time the best defence against evil thoughts. For this, too, we may pray to God: "Lift up my mind oppressed with the load of sins, and raise my whole desire towards heavenly things, that, having tasted the sweetness of the happiness above, I may have no pleasure in thinking of the things of the earth."

Resolve this day to keep your whole thought with Jesus.

Conclusion: "All for Thee, most Sacred Heart of Jesus."

SEPTEMBER 20

OUR NEIGHBOR

The law of God commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. This love will prompt us to wish him well, to aid him

when he is in need, and to desire good things for his soul as well as for his body. A lively interest in our neighbor's welfare is, therefore, a duty.

However, in this very obligation lurks a danger. We are not to be curious in inquiring into the lives of others. "For what is it to thee whether this man be such or such? or that man do or say this or the other? thou art not to answer for others, but must give an account of thyself; why, therefore, dost thou meddle with them?"

Too much concern for one's neighbor is carrying the point too far. Each man must work out his own salvation, and although we may and should be helpful where aid is needed, yet we must not meddle with the affairs of others. Where we see or think we see our neighbor suffering detriment to his soul, unless we are in a position of authority, or know that a kind word from us will be effective, we must refer the whole matter to God in prayer. "God knows everyone, and sees all things that are done under the sun; and He knows how it is with everyone, what he thinks, what he would have, and at what his intention aims. All things are therefore to be committed to Him." Many a Christian forgets that "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," or while praying, fails to realize that the Lord often demands perseverance in prayer as a condition for granting the petition. The natural means of benefiting our neighbor are too often unduly emphasized, and the supernatural made secondary or often neglected entirely. It is wise as well as holy to be wary, lest we interfere where more harm than good will be accomplished. If our position demands it, duty should urge us to act, otherwise prudence cautions tact, whereas sanctity counsels prayer.

Resolution: Meddle not with the lives of others without warrant.

Conclusion: "Almighty and eternal God, whose gift it is

that Thy faithful serve Thee worthily and rightly, grant us, we beseech Thee, that we may without offence hasten on to the fulfilment of Thy promises." (*Missal,* prayer for the 12th Sunday after Pentecost.)

SEPTEMBER 21

GOOD NAME

"Be not solicitous for the shadow of a great name," is the advice given us, if we would have peace of mind. We must, indeed, desire a good name and seek to preserve it. Should we, however, through no fault of ours, come under a cloud, we ought not to be too much disturbed, knowing as we do that we are what we are in the eyes of God, and that He, in His own good time, will vindicate our good name, or flood our hearts with His holy consolation, should it please Him that we remain under the shadow of suspicion or even of disgrace. If, on the other hand, we are too much concerned about a good reputation, we will entangle ourselves in many distractions of soul and much confusion of heart. When it may honestly be said that we have done nothing to injure our reputation, then we may confidently trust to God to clear us, or to leave us a sweet peace of mind, although in the eyes of the world we are to be condemned.

We may act similarly with regard to the affections of men for us. All men desire the affections of others. In itself, there is no evil in enjoying these affections, provided only that they be innocent. However, here also the advice is given: "Seek neither to be familiarly acquainted with many, nor to be particularly loved by men." If we have many acquaintances and are loved by many, we may rejoice in the Lord. But a holy indifference should be cultivated amidst these friends and

affections, which will make it possible to detach the heart easily from both friends and their affections, should that demand be made. When the heart is not attached to creatures and creature comforts, then it may be said to love God above all, and peace will be the natural consequence.

Resolution: Resign yourself to God's holy will in all things.

Conclusion: "O God, who didst teach the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit ever to delight in those things which are right and to rejoice in His consolations," grant us His peace through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

SEPTEMBER 22

THE WAY OF PEACE

There is no question but that our dear Lord promised His peace to men, for He said: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, do I give unto you." (John XIV, 27). If we are not in the possession of this heavenly peace, there is something lacking on our part which deprives us of it.

A common hindrance to the peace of God in the soul is the lack of a pure intention. "All the value of our labors, spiritual and temporal, however multiplied and strenuous they may be, depends upon the interior motive that inspires them, and turns on the question whether they are performed primarily and principally, if not solely and entirely, for God's glory or our own." No true spiritual peace will follow our works if they be not performed with the pure intention of pleasing God. "In everything attend to thyself, what thou art doing, and what thou art saying; and direct thy whole intention to this, that thou mayest please Me alone, and neither desire

nor seek anything out of Me." Such conduct assures peace, for no matter what the outcome of our action may be, the thought will assert itself that the intention was good, and was known to almighty God, who looks to the heart and its intentions rather than to the success of our accomplishments.

Neither will the kind or manner of our labors make much difference to us since all are equally pleasing to God, provided they are in accordance with His will and done entirely for Him. Nor will the question of position have an influence upon our peace, for no matter what our position in life is, we may please God, whether elevated or lowly, if we only desire to do all for Him. "In offering thyself with thy whole heart to the will of God, not seeking the things that are thine, either in little or great, either in time or in eternity," is productive of the peace of God.

Resolve to have an entire contempt of yourself, and you will enjoy an abundance of peace.

Conclusion: "O Lord Jesus Christ, who didst say to Thy Apostles: Peace I give you, My peace I leave you; look not upon my sins, but upon the faith of Thy Church," and grant me true peace of mind and heart.

SEPTEMBER 23

BODILY NEEDS

A goodly portion of most men's lives must of necessity be devoted to the obtaining of food, drink, clothing, and other needs of the body, for themselves and often, too, for others dependent upon them. Add to this the care requisite to preserve health, or to regain lost health, and you have many factors disturbing to the peace of man's soul. "Behold, eating,

drinking, clothing and other necessaries appertaining to the support of the body, are burdensome to a fervent soul." It would be wrong wilfully to neglect any one of these needs. "This is the work of a perfect man, never to let one's mind slacken from attending to heavenly things, and to pass through many cares, as it were without care; not after the manner of an indolent person, but by a certain prerogative of a free mind, which does not cleave by an inordinate affection to anything created."

To bring the mind to a state that it is easily satisfied with the bare necessities of life, to be satisfied with less rather than to require more, to consider not so much the quality as fitness to supply the need, makes possible a peace of mind amidst all the distracting cares that must ensue in the supplying of our daily needs. The very necessity of these things for the human body supplies an argument for the less fervent to seek them inordinately, and to indulge their use excessively. Well may it be said in the words of *The Following of Christ:* "Grant that I may use such things with moderation, and not be entangled with an inordinate affection for them. It is not lawful to cast them all away, for nature must be supported; but to require superfluities, and such things as are most delightful, Thy holy law forbids; for otherwise the flesh would grow insolent against the spirit."

Resolution: "Make me look upon as bitter all carnal comfort which withdraws me from the love of things eternal."

Conclusion: "Preserve me, I beseech Thee, O my most merciful God, from the cares of this life, that I be not too much entangled by them; from the many necessities of the body, that I may not be ensnared by pleasure; and from all hindrances of the soul lest, being overcome by troubles, I be cast down."

SEPTEMBER 24

PEACE WITHIN

That so many start out with wrong principles is the reason why peace and serenity of heart eludes them. In the opinion of the world a man is made happy and consequently enjoys peace, if he has riches, holds a high position among his fellow-men, and is honored by all with whom he associates. The idea is incorrect, for, despite the possessions of all of these things, there may be a woeful lack of happiness and peace. On the other hand it will be found that those who despise these very advantages which the world so eagerly seeks, are the happiest of men.

The explanation of this strange fact is that happiness comes from within, and that it may be enjoyed anywhere and at any time, in company and when alone, for if possessed in the heart, we carry it about with us always. Not so with those who seek their happiness from exterior things; for, first of all, these things have not the power of giving it; secondly, even if they could give it, experience shows that only very seldom may it be enjoyed without disturbance of some kind or other. At one time it may be ill health that is the disturbing factor; at another, the weather; again, some whim or fancy of some one higher in authority than we are. "It is not therefore the obtaining or multiplying things exteriorly that avails thee, but rather the despising of them, and tearing them up by the root out of thy heart; which I would not have thee to understand only with regard to money and riches, but also with regard to the ambition of honor, and the desire of empty praise, all which things pass away with

the world." We may change our condition in life, we may change our environment, we may change our whole manner of living; but unless we have within us a peace which springs from a clean conscience and detachment from created things, we will not have true and satisfying happiness.

Resolution: Learn to seek God, to relish Him, and to understand all things as they are, according to the order of His wisdom.

Conclusion: "O God! give me power to be strengthened in the inward man, and to cast out of my heart all unprofitable care and trouble."

SEPTEMBER 25

TALK OF THE WORLDLY

Usually the man who is genuinely devout will be talked about. That which will seem good in his conduct among Catholics, will be criticized, declared to be eccentric, and even condemned as hypocritical by those who do not understand. Naturally, the conduct of the devout man must differ from that of the man of the world, for the very reason that the principles of the world are opposed to the principles of Christ. Because he walks another path than the children of the world, a path which only comparatively few follow, he must become conspicuous, for although he is not of the world, nevertheless he is still in the world, seen by and associating with the worldly-minded. However, the poor reputation which we acquire in the eyes of the worldly by our devotion, should neither discourage nor keep us from good actions in public when there is reason for doing them

publicly. "Take it not to heart if some people think ill of thee, and say to thee what thou art not willing to hear. . . . If thou walkest interiorly, thou wilt make small account of flying words. It is no small prudence to be silent in the evil time, and to turn within to God; and not to be disturbed with the judgment of men."

The reason for such thought and talk about the devout by the worldly-minded seems to be the rebuke offered to their own conduct of life by those who follow principles diametrically opposed to theirs, which, if they are honest with themselves, they must admit are so much higher, nobler and more ideal than those of the world. To justify themselves and to pacify a ruffled conscience, they hold and declare that he who pursues an opposite course, is eccentric and hypocritical, foolish and unbalanced. "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake: be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." (Matt. V, 11–12).

Resolution: "Let not thy peace be put in the tongues of men; for whether they put a good or bad construction on what thou doest, thou art still what thou art."

Conclusion: "All for Thee, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus!"

SEPTEMBER 26

AID IN TRIBULATION

In the life of every man there come trials, tribulations, and temptations which disturb his peace of mind. Trials such as a long period of spiritual dryness, suspicions concerning one's motives and actions, absolute neglect and distrust from those whom we respect and love, will ever and anon harass

the heart of man. Trials such as the loss of reputation or the loss of health will now and then grieve the soul. Temptations such as worldliness in the pursuit of pleasure, avarice in the gaining of wealth, luxury in the indulgence of sensual gratifications from time to time assail the devout man.

When the soul's peace is thus disturbed, the mind confused and the heart filled with anxiety, it is then, if ever, that the soul needs a friend. No earthly friend will do, for usually no one can properly understand the nature and the extent of the trouble in which the individual soul is immersed. The only one who can do so adequately and to the soul's satisfaction is God. Such sentiments as these will naturally arise in the devout soul: "Now, dear Father, what shall I say? I am taken, Lord, in these straits; oh, save me from this hour." "Give me patience, O Lord, at this time." "Help me, O my God, and I will not fear, how much soever I may be oppressed." "And now in the midst of these things, what shall I say? Lord, Thy will be done." Thus the soul must cry for aid from the Almighty, no matter how dark, how confused, and how desolate things may look. He alone can help, He in his own good time *will* help. "I must needs bear it, and would to God it may be with patience, till the storm be over, and it be better." God may seem far away, but in reality He is very near, and we may say to Him: "Thy almighty hand is able to take away from me this temptation also, and moderate its violence, as Thou hast often done heretofore for me, lest I quite sink under it, O my God."

Resolution: "I cannot fly from tribulation, but must of necessity fly to Thee, that Thou mayest help me, and turn it to my good."

Conclusion: "O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee."

SEPTEMBER 27

NO OTHER HELP

Strange to relate, there are men and women who, when sorely tired, come to God for help only after every other source of aid has been found wanting. We must remember that after the fall, man became very material-minded, and seemingly his first inclination, no matter in what trouble he was involved, was to grasp for help on something visible, tangible, and material. Only after he found that this could not help him, did he turn to God. Proof of this truth is found through all the pages of the Old Testament, in the history of the Chosen People of God. Human nature has not changed, and the same holds true now among a great number of Christians, including those who have made some progress on the way to perfection. In resisting one temptation, they fall into another. The man who is scrupulous about one particular kind of sin, is often shockingly lax with regard to other sins, seemingly seeking to compensate himself by laxity on the one hand for the anxiety he suffers on the other. Another who is poor, may, when a stroke of fortune enriches him for a time, go to the very opposite of what he has been suffering, to the sheerest prodigality, thinking within himself that he has a right to make up for the deprivations suffered during his impoverishment. Still another, who has been tortured with many and repeated temptations against a definite virtue, will after a successful resistance, often fail against some other virtue, soothing his conscience with the plea that he had long withstood temptation in one regard, and that he ought to be allowed a little leeway in another. "This is that which most of all

hinders heavenly comfort, that thou art slow in turning thyself to God in Prayer." He who goes to God immediately in trial and trouble, will be comforted by Him, and will not seek a compensation for his fidelity in one way by remissness in another.

Resolution: "Where is thy faith? Stand firmly and with perseverance."

Conclusion: "Son, I am the Lord, who gives strength in day of tribulation. Come to Me when it is not well with thee."

SEPTEMBER 28

CONFUSION OF SOUL

While there are times when the soul is serene, there are also periods of the most trying confusion. Brought on by temptation, confusion agitates the soul. There is the fear of having yielded to temptation, although the whole soul recoils at the thought of deliberately offending God. Then there is a sense of having committed sin, but the question arises as to whether or not it was grievous. There is a feeling of blame and there are reasons for blamelessness. A heavy desolateness robs the mind of the power of thinking clearly and reasoning soberly. Whether the soul is worthy of God's hatred or enjoys His love, seems to be an unanswerable question.

Added to this are thoughts concerning the security of the past and the chances of the future. God seems to have deserted us entirely. Then above all is the time to believe in God and to trust in His mercy. "When thou judgest that almost all is lost, then oftentimes it is that thou art in the way of greatest gain of merit. All is not lost when anything falls out otherwise than thou wouldst have it. Thou must not judge according to thy present feeling nor give thyself up in

such a manner to any trouble, from whence soever it comes; or take it so as if all hope were gone of being delivered out of it. Think thyself not wholly forsaken, although for a time I have sent thee some tribulation, or withdrawn from thee the comfort which thou desirest; for this is the way to the Kingdom of Heaven."

We must pray, redouble our prayers, and wait. The past and the future must all be left to the mercy of God. Nothing of what we are accustomed to do must be left undone. We must, to the best of our ability, continue as we are wont to to do when enjoying God's sensible consolation. In His own good time He will make all clear.

Resolution: "Let not thy heart be troubled, and let it not fear."

Conclusion: "Despise not Thy people, O Almighty God, when they cry out in their affliction, but graciously aid them in their tribulation, for the glory of Thy name." (*Missal,* Prayer for the Votive Mass "In Time of Trouble or Distress").

SEPTEMBER 29

VALUE OF TRIBULATION

It is much easier to endure suffering if we know the reason for it. If a man were told that his leg must be amputated, he would be indignant and unwilling if he did not know the reason for it, but if he were told that unless he submit, a poisoning would set in which would cost him his life, he would assume quite a different attitude. Similarly when we have to suffer spiritually, we may be rebellious if we can find no reason for it, but if we heard our dear Lord say: "I know thy secret thoughts, I know that it is very expedient for thy soul that thou shouldst sometimes be left without consola-

tion, lest thou shouldst be puffed up with good success, and shouldst take a complaisance in thyself, imaginging thyself to be what thou art not," then we would see a good reason for suffering what the good God sends us, and we would more willingly endure what goes against our inclinations. When afflictions, trials or difficulties come upon us, if we think rightly of God who permits them, we know that they are for our benefit. Perhaps they are designed to purify our intention, for when we serve God without joy and without consolation, we surely please him more than when our service is accompanied by these consolations. Our service of Him is then strictly for Him and not for the joy and consolation we may experience in it. "If thou thinkest rightly, and considerest things in truth, thou oughtest never to be much dejected and troubled for any adversity, but rather to rejoice and give thanks; yea, to account this as a special subject of joy, that afflicting thee with sorrows I do not spare thee."

It is, moreover, a special trust of God in thee to expect that you will serve Him faithfully even when He allows tribulation to come upon you. It is almost needless to mention the great augmentation of merit our fidelity under these circumstances obtains.

Resolution: "If God sends thee affliction or any adversity, repine not, neither let thy heart be cast down."

Conclusion: Hear Christ say: "Son, I am the Lord, who gives strength in the day of tribulations. Come to Me when it is not well with thee."

SEPTEMBER 30

FREEDOM

The great athletes of ancient as well as modern days, those men of brawn and agility who accomplished extraordinary

feats of strength and skill that drew forth the admiration and enthusiasm of the spectators, these men, I say, wished to be hampered by as few garments as possible. Hence in their contests they were very scantily clad so as to have their limbs and muscles free for action. The soul that wishes freedom for its activities must disrobe itself of things created, employ only what is necessary, so as not to be hampered in the pursuit of the spiritual. The spiritual feats accomplished will be in proportion to the freedom attained from the things of the world. These bind and fetter a soul, and the freer we are from them, the better shall we be able to obtain spiritual efficiency.

Those, perhaps, who are most free are contemplative persons. Giving their whole attention to God, they use only what is necessary of created things. They gave up the things of this world not so much because they were contemplatives, but rather they became contemplatives because they freed themselves of the things of this world. Because of a clinging to worldly comforts and conveniences, most people cannot understand and appreciate the contemplative life. And this is the reason why there are found so few contemplative persons; "because there are few who sequester themselves wholly from transitory and created things." The solicitude for and the indulgence in the things of earth make a man's mind earthly. Freed from these cares and loosed from their clutches, the mind is enabled to soar to God. It is filled with a light which is unattainable otherwise. "There is a great difference between the wisdom of an illuminated devout man, and the knowledge of a scholar. Far more noble is that learning that flows from above, from the divine influence, than that which is acquired with labor by the industry of man."

Resolution: To disregard things created, so that we may find the Creator.

Conclusion: "Lord, I stand much in need of a greater

grace, if I must arrive so far, that it may not be in the power of any man or any thing created to hinder me."

OCTOBER 1

FORMALISM

Unless a man be given to contemplation (the word is here used in its wider sense), his devotions are apt to develop into mere formalism. They have no soul. Being engrossed in the things of this world, the devotions performed very often proceed from habit, or, deteriorate into mere action without the warmth-giving life that is imparted by a lively love for Jesus on whom our thoughts ought to be fixed. "I know not what it is, by what spirit we are led, or what we pretend to, who seem to be called spiritual persons; that we take so much pains, and have a great solicitude for transitory and mean things, and scarce ever have our senses fully recollected to think of our own interior." We begin to think of things pertinent to the life of our soul, and hardly have we begun, when our minds are distracted to something else, and what might have brought good fruit, is at once dissipated.

We take no notice where our affections lie. For days, sometimes years, we are bound to earthly things, and only when illumined by some great grace of God, do we realize that, instead of serving God, we have been pampering ourselves with delusion, we have been serving self rather than God. Seldom do we lament the great want of purity of intention in all we do. Thus even our better actions are vitiated by the lack of a pure intention. If the heart does not ring true, neither can the actions that proceed from that heart ring true. Hence the reason to fear formalism. The actions are expressive, it is true, but not supported by the heart. As man

bases his judgments and opinions on outward actions, the man of formalism may pass for an excellent man and Christian, and still may not be so at heart. A true estimate of a man would be gained by asking, not what he has done, but rather with what virtue he has acted.

Resolution: Weigh your works well by a strict examination of conscience.

Conclusion: "O God, who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to relish what is right and ever to rejoice in His consolation." (*Missal,* Prayer for Trinity Sunday).

OCTOBER 2

DESIRES

Daniel, the prophet, in Holy Scripture is called a "man of desires." We all have many desires, some which eventually we fulfill, others that are wholly superfluous and ineffectual. Many desire to be what they may not be or cannot be; others wish to do what they cannot possibly do; while still others want to have what they have not, or what they can never expect to have. Thus, much time and thought are given to things that cannot possibly be, and the peace of mind of the individual is sadly disturbed, to no benefit whatsoever.

However, there must be desires pleasing to God and beneficial for the soul, otherwise the phrase "a man of desires," as applied to Daniel, would not have been in his praise. The fact is, the desires here referred to are desires which are to God's benefit, not to our own, except perhaps indirectly. Such desires as Daniel's were that God might be more praised and glorified than He actually is, that His

holy will might be better known and done than it is at present, that he might have the tongues of all good men to honor and adore God, that he might have all the faculties of all the angels with which to do the will of God. Desires such as these are very different from those which ordinarily occupy the minds of men. The latter are selfishly concerned with man's comfort and convenience, they flatter his self-love, and take him farther away from God rather than bring him nearer to Him. "All self-seekers and self-lovers are bound in fetters, full of desires, full of cares, unsettled, and seeking always their own ease, and not the things of Jesus Christ; but oftentimes devising and framing that which shall not stand."

To desire God's good rather than our own seems to be contrary to the ordinary custom of man. So it is; but it is the Christian way, and the only way conducive to genuine peace.

Resolution: Forsake all and thou shalt find all; leave thy desires and thou shalt find rest. (Matt. XI, 29).

Conclusion: O God, to whom all desires are known, purify the thoughts of our hearts by the inpouring of the Holy Spirit.

OCTOBER 3

AN EVEN TEMPER

"As long as thou livest, thou art subject to change, even against thy will, so as to be sometimes joyful, at other times sad; now easy, now troubled; at one time devout, at another dry; sometimes fervent, at other times sluggish; one day heavy, another day light. But he that is wise and well in-

structed in the spirit, stands above all these changes; not minding what he feels in himself, nor on what side the wind of mutability blows; but that the whole bent of his soul may advance towards its due and wished for end." The man who is even-tempered at all times will possess uninterrupted peace of mind, lay up much merit for Heaven, and be beloved of men. He will also be beloved of God, for this quality in a man presupposses no small amount of sanctity, since to be even-tempered requires self-control and mortification in no small degree.

When the motive of practicing the self-restraint required is not to develop a charming and attractive character, but rather to please God and to resign oneself entirely to His Providence, then the individual discloses virtues most desirable for the soul and very pleasing to God.

Some people are gifted by nature with an even temper, but the majority must acquire it by years of faithful struggle. The secret of its acquisition is the entire abandonment of oneself into the hands of God with an unwavering trust and confidence. Let happen what will, God in His goodness will allow only what is to our present good or what will turn to our good in time. In all He is ever present to aid, to strengthen, to console, to encourage and to forgive. Thus the even-tempered man is always coming closer and closer to God, his intention ever becomes more purified, his faith, hope and love of God are always being more intensified. This quality of mind may seem of less importance than many others; when analyzed, however, it will be found to enfold a whole series of virtues.

Resolution: Learn to preserve an even temper in every contingency of life.

Conclusion: "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine."

OCTOBER 4

UNEASINESS OF MIND

St. Augustine once said that his soul could find no peace until it rested in God. The Saint was able to speak from experience, having sought happiness in a diversity of ways and always being disappointed. Could honor have brought ease of mind, Augustine would have experienced it; could sensual pleasure have effected it, he would have partaken of it richly. No, none of these could satisfy his restless mind; only after he had come to God by a sincere conversion, was he able to secure rest and peace. "He that has a relish for God will find all things savory, and to him that does not relish God, what can ever yield any true delight? But the wise of this world and the admirers of the flesh are far from the relish of God's wisdom, because in the world is much vanity and following the flesh leads to death."

How many miss this truth and yearn for those things which can bring them no ease of mind! The elusive advantages of an honorable position beckon them on. Either they fail in the pursuit of an honorable career, or if gained, they realize the vanity of it all and the utter impossibility of it satisfying their heart's yearning. The pleasures of this world and those of the flesh allure through the senses, if indulged at the cost of sin, remorse and flaying unrest of mind follow in their course. On the other hand he who has turned sincerely to God, experiences the sweetest delights.

"My God and my all!" is enough said to him that understands; and it is delightful to him who loves to repeat it often. For when God is present, all things yield delight; but when He is absent, all things are loathsome." Well may the

soul devoted to God say: "Thou makest us to think well of all and praise Thee in all things; nor can anything afford any lasting pleasure without Thee."

Resolution: Seek thy ease of mind in a good conscience and in the love of God alone.

Conclusion: "O God! when shall the desirable and pleasant hour come, when Thou shalt fill me with Thy presence and become to me all in all."

OCTOBER 5

ALL FOR JESUS

"Thou must be willing to suffer all things for the love of God, *viz:* labors and sorrows, temptations and vexations, anxieties, necessities, sicknesses, injuries, detraction, reprehensions, humiliations, confusions, corrections and contempts." These trials, together with the joys and innocent pleasures of life, fill up man's earthly days. They must be taken from the hand of God with equanimity,—the bitter as well as the sweet. A wonderful peace floods the hearts of those who are able to say in every contingency: "All for Jesus!"

The lives of the saints were no different from ours. Their days, too, were a mixture of joys and sorrows, oftentimes with a preponderance of sorrow. That which made them saints and different from their contemporaries, was not a difference of their lot, but a generosity of heart and a zeal for God's glory which drew from them, in every phase of life, a hearty acceptance of whatever came from God's providence, and a sincere acquiescence in His divine will in all things whether good or burdensome, by a magnanimous "All for Jesus."

Some think that the lives of the saints were one series of pleasant hours spent in communion with God. This, however, was not the case, for their lives as a whole were the same as those of any other good man or woman; they may have appeared smooth and unruffled because of the accommodation of their wills with that of God in all things, but they had the same admixture of joy and sorrow as the lives of others. In the good there can be no great disturbance in life, because the union of the will of the creature with that of the Creator brings perfect harmony. That does not mean, however, that there will be no bitterness, sorrow and desolation in that life, for God often severely afflicts those whom He loves most. Thus they are given an opportunity to prove their love for Him, to lay up merits, and to practice many virtues.

Resolution: "Act manfully and be of good heart: do not despond, do not fall off, but constantly offer both soul and body for the glory of God."

Conclusion: "May the most just, most high, and most adorable will of God be done in all things, praised and magnified forever."

OCTOBER 6

THE JUDGMENT OF MEN

All our public actions are open to the judgment of men. Men judge from appearances, but God judges the heart. The best of our good actions under certain circumstances will admit of misinterpretation, and if the action itself cannot be criticized, the motive may be impugned. Hence, do what you will, your actions will not entirely satisfy everybody.

This statement is borne out by the example of St. Paul. "He labored for the edification and salvation of others, as much as he could, and as much as lay in him; but he could not prevent his being sometimes misjudged and despised by others."

The weapons which St. Paul used against injustice were patience and humility. "Though he endeavored to please all in the Lord, and made himself all unto all, yet he made little account of his being judged by the judgment of men." When misjudged and misinterpreted, he consoled himself with the thought that it was the judgment of God alone that counted. He knew that His divine Master, who is omniscient and all-just would understand all that he did, the action as well as the motive, and furthermore would reward him for good will, no matter what the judgment of men might be. As to what the thoughts of men might be concerning his personal worth and the goodness of his actions, the worse they thought of him and his conduct, the better he was pleased, provided only the honor and glory of God did not suffer. The less men thought of him, the nearer they approached the truth concerning him, was his humble thought. He sometimes answered them, lest his silence might give scandal to the weak.

St. Paul is a model for our own conduct and attitude toward the judgment of men on our worth and conduct. Therefore, commit all to God, who knows all, and defend yourself by patience and humility against the tongues of those who speak evil or think and say evil things about you.

Resolution: "Fear God, and thou shalt have no need of being afraid of men."

Conclusion: "Look up to me, who am able to deliver thee from all confusion and wrong, and to repay every one according to his work."

OCTOBER 7

ABANDONMENT OF OURSELVES TO GOD

The happiest man, the one who experiences the greatest peace, is he who abandons himself entirely and without reserve to the Providence of God. To be able to do this, it is, of course, necessary to divest oneself of all self-will, and resign oneself entirely to the will of God. "Always, and at all times; as in little so also in great: I make no exception, but will have thee to be found in all things divested of thyself."

In the beginning of a devout life this course of conduct seems to offer but little difficulty. The generosity of the soul toward God, and God's sweet consolations sensibly felt, make it easy for the soul to resign herself to the will of God. As time goes on, however, and the soul is gradually weaned from the sweetness of her first ardor, and God is served more out of a motive of faith and love, when the bitter things are tasted in all their bitterness, when God leaves the soul in its own loneliness and does not counter-balance what is hard and difficult by a flood of heavenly consolation, because He would have us serve Him out of love for Him alone,—then to abandon oneself to Him becomes a more difficult task. Under these circumstances self-abandonment to God is more meritorious than when compensated by spiritual consolation. To be able amidst trials and difficulties to be resigned to and praise the will of God, denotes progress in the devout life. "Some there are that at first offer all, but afterwards, assaulted by temptation, return again to what they left; and therefore they make no progress in virtue." Others also resign themselves, but it is with some exception; for they do not trust wholly in God, and are busy providing for them-

selves. Spoil not a good beginning by weakening and returning to self, but "give all for all, seek nothing, call nothing back, stand purely, with a full confidence in God; and thou shalt possess God."

Resolution: "Forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy a great inward peace."

Conclusion: "Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee."

OCTOBER 8

SLAVE OR FREEMAN?

"Thou must make it thy aim, in every place and in every action or outward employment, to be inwardly free and master of thyself; that all things may be under thee, and not thou under them." There is an opinion sometimes expressed, that man must at times fail by very force of the circumstances under which he labors. This thought, if true, that man is not free under all circumstances to do what he wills, must consequently deny the freedom of the will.

Environment and outward conditions may influence the will, but they can never force it. It is just this fixity of will to serve God and be loyal to Him no matter what the outward surrounding or the exterior action, that is to be so desired for our peace of mind. Loyalty is not dependent upon the things that surround us, but it lives in the soul. We carry it with us, no matter where we go, and it shines even brighter under adverse circumstances and surroundings. It dominates what is outside and cannot be overcome if guarded in the soul. But when outside influences are allowed to prey upon the will, there is grave danger of its being moved from its firm resolve. The master-hand, then, must be in the soul, to repel, to neutralize, and to change baneful influences, so that

they can do no harm. The man who acts in this manner is he "who suffers himself not to be drawn away by temporal things to cleave to them, but rather draws those things to that end for which they were ordained by God, and appointed by that sovereign Artist, who has left nothing on all His works but what is regular and orderly."

When a man surrenders his freedom and becomes a slave to the things around him, it is not because of the power of what is outside of him, but rather because of some disorderly affection within his soul, which plays the traitor and makes him the slave of what otherwise could not hurt him.

Resolution: "Thou must be lord and ruler of thy actions, not a slave or bondsman."

Conclusion: "Jesus, my God, I love Thee above all things."

OCTOBER 9

OVER-EAGERNESS

As in worldly affairs, so also in spiritual matters, a man may be over-eager. The man in the world who is over-eager will strain his every faculty in the attainment of his purpose. At times his whole mind is so engrossed in that pursuit that he has neither time nor inclination for anything else. He will sacrifice recreation and friends, sleep and proper nourishment, ease and comfort all for the attainment of a certain good.

It would seem laudable to show such eagerness for a spiritual good, yet, if our eagerness be excessive, it is not praiseworthy. In the spiritual realm, too, there should be nothing inordinate. A spiritual good should be sought only in as much and in as far as it is pleasing to God. In all one's striving, the thought must always be present, that the will of God be done,

and in the pursuit of what is thought to be in accordance with the will of God, the individual must not strive as though all depended upon him, but rather always leave room for the work of God. Similarly, as in worldly matters, it will be found that "oftentimes a man eagerly sets about a thing which he desires; but when he has obtained it, he begins to be of another mind. For men's inclinations are not wont to continue long upon the same thing, but rather pass from one thing to another." To retain peace of mind, therefore, what we attempt should always be with a generous resignation to the will of God. He knows what is best for us. Impetuosity should be avoided, so that once we have determined to attain a spiritual good, it will not be with a rush in the beginning, which will soon slacken without accomplishing anything. If a gradual and persevering method is adopted, with God's grace much will be accomplished.

Resolution: "Lord, I willingly commit all things to Thee; for my care can profit little."

Conclusion: "O Lord, I wish I were not so much set upon future events, but offered myself with all readiness to Thy divine pleasure."

OCTOBER 10

GOD AND MAN

God is unchangeable, ever the one true God, the holy God, the mighty God, the loving God, always to be adored by every creature, in all places, for all eternity. Man, on the other hand is changeable, more inclined to go backward than forward, not continuing in the same state. God is a necessary being, who always was and always will be. Man is

nothing, can do nothing, can have nothing of himself that is good, but fails and is defective in all things, and ever tends to nothing. God is always the same and endures forever, always good, just, and holy. Man may become tepid and dissolute, lives on earth for a time, always depends on God's goodness, ever fears His justice, and continually is tempted to sin against and to offend His holiness.

What has man, then, in which to glory? His only reason for glorying is in the Lord. What he is, God has made him. What he has, God has given him. In whatever he does, God helps him. When left to himself, he falls into sin. Only through God is man anything. Only through God can he possess anything, can he do anything, that is worthy of Heaven.

When he tries to go on alone, man finds how weak he is. "Yet it quickly becomes better when it pleaseth God, and He stretches out His helping hand; for He alone, without man's aid, can assist man, that his countenance shall be no more changed, but his heart shall be converted and rest in God alone."

Oh, the richness of God and the poverty of man! Would that man realized this fact and rejoiced in God's greatness and acknowledged his own indigence! The reason for man's pride, vainglory, sin, and want of virtue is his wrong notion of God and of himself. Mistakenly, so often man's relation with God is not that of a creature with the Creator, the subject with the Master, and the son with the Father, but rather he seeks a position, as it were, of equality, with God, he wishes to be independent, insubordinate, unhampered.

Resolution: "In Thee will I glory and rejoice all the day; but for myself I will glory in nothing but my infirmities."

Conclusion: "O my Truth and my Mercy, my God, O blessed Trinity! to Thee alone be all praise, honor, power, and glory, for endless ages."

OCTOBER 11

JEALOUSY

It is reserved for the few to occupy the high places in life and to command others. By far the greater number of men are in positions which demand respect for superiors and obedience to their commands. Thus it happens that be we among the ruling class or among those who have acquired a position either of authority or social standing, there are those who are either our inferiors, or our equals, or at least are not much elevated above us. The very worst thing that we can do under such circumstances is to be jealous of the good fortune of those above us. Jealousy robs us of our peace of mind, accomplishes nothing, and gives us remorse and shame. Although there is much haughtiness and autocracy among superiors, yet it must be admitted that the majority of those in position are humble, humane, gracious, and kind. Because of their position and the abuse of such position by some, the good are often maligned, less loved, and calumniated. But were we able to abstract from their positions and to see as they are, we would be surprised and astonished by their noble and amiable characters. That one of our equals, and perhaps even an inferior, has risen to a high position, is no reason to believe that his attitude towards us has changed, except, perhaps, so far as his position, if it be a ruling one, of necessity demands. If we understood and realized these facts, we would not be so easily inclined to jealousy, but rather rest content in our own position. We would rejoice rather in being spared the burden and responsibility of high position and be satisfied in our present state. Unless we treat all our superiors with respect, love, and good will, we shall never enjoy peace of mind.

Resolution: "Lift up your heart to Heaven and you will not be concerned at seeing your brother honored and advanced."

Conclusion: "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine."

OCTOBER 12

FRIENDS AND PEACE

It is good for man to have friends. God Himself has commanded that we love one another. When this love is mutual, we have the essence of friendship. Man's nature demands one like unto himself with whom he may associate. There is, however, a danger lurking in friendship which may not always appear upon the surface, namely, inordinate love. Inordinate love of a friend discloses itself, if it interferes in any way with the love due to God. The love of God must always have the first place in our hearts. Hence, a true love of a friend is one that is founded on the love of God.

Much of the difficulty with regard to the love of friends is caused just by this requisite being neglected. The man who does not raise his love of a friend to this exalted level will sooner or later offend in his love for almighty God. The creature will be usurping the love which properly belongs to the Creator. "If thou placest thy peace in any person, for the sake of thy contentment in his company, thou shalt be unsettled and entangled." You will seek in your friend that which he is unable to give you and which can come from God alone. The friendship will not be enduring, and there will be a seeking for a multiplicity of friends. Disappointment and sadness will follow, as no one can be found to supply the

peace that only God can give. On the contrary, he who loves his friends in the Lord, and only in as much as it pleases Him, will find in them a help, but his true source of peace will be in the eternal Friend. He will not be unduly grieved in losing a friend, because he recognizes the will of God in his loss, for he possessed his friend only as lent him by God. His peace is not dependent upon his friends, but upon God, who is above all his friends.

Resolution: Remember "how little soever it be, if a thing be inordinately loved and regarded, it keeps thee back from the sovereign good, and corrupts the soul."

Conclusion: "O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I implore that I may ever love Thee more and more."

OCTOBER 13

LEARNING

All learning that is not made a vehicle of serving God is vain. Whether it be the knowledge necessary to follow some learned profession or whether it be the knowledge requisite to be considered among the cultured, unless it can in some way be dove-tailed into our aim of loving and serving God more proficiently, it is no spiritual asset, and may actually become harmful for the soul.

In our days, when learning so often lacks humility, men sometimes study merely to appear learned or wise. How much wiser, however, is the illiterate old man or woman who has God for his teacher! Such as these are not worldly-wise, but they have a heavenly wisdom which is often the admiration of the learned. We are at a loss to know how they have learned so much. The reason is not far to seek. "I am He that teacheth men knowledge, and give a more clear understand-

ing to little ones than can be taught by man. . . . I am He that can in an instant elevate an humble mind, to comprehend more reasons of the eternal truth, than could be acquired by ten years of study in the schools." Hence the secret of knowing what alone is valuable for the soul is humility, not depending so much upon the human intellect as upon the light and understanding imparted by the Holy Spirit. This does not mean to say that books are to be despised or neglected, but rather that in reading, in listening to sermons or instructions, and in private conference, we must attend to the words as of Christ, which inflame the heart and enlighten the mind, which excite to compunction and afford manifold consolations; in short we must be oblivious of the means by which God speaks to us and attend solely to what is said, as if coming from Him directly. "The voice of the books is the same, but it teacheth not all men alike; because I within am the Teacher of truth—the Searcher of the heart—the Understander of thoughts—the Prompter of actions; distributing to every one as I judge fit."

Resolution: "Study to mortify thy vices, for this will help thee more than being able to answer many hard questions."

Conclusion: "O Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, light of the world, I adore Thee; for Thee I live, for Thee I die."

OCTOBER 14

WORLDINESS

Unless a man be continually on his guard, he will become so immersed in worldly affairs as to neglect his soul. "That which is of little or no profit takes up our thoughts; and that which is above all necessary, is negligently passed over; for

the whole man sinks down into outward things, and unless he quickly recover himself, he willingly continues immersed in them." Worldly concerns come so thick and fast around us that to escape them we should be compelled to hide ourselves in some monastery or dwell in some mountain fastness, and even there we should not be entirely without them.

But as the fish lives in the water and is not drowned in it, neither need we, living in the world, be harmed by it. To keep the interests of the soul above those of the world it is necessary to prize the supernatural above the natural, not to allow one's affections to settle upon worldly things, and to withdraw ourselves as far as possible from earthly concerns, in order to keep our thoughts upon Heaven. If we can bring ourselves to use worldly things only in as much as they are necessary for our sustenance, and only in so far as they can be made compatible with our eternal destiny, we will find no difficulty in asigning to them their proper place and in making them subservient to our spiritual aims.

To be detached from the world does not mean entire abstention from the use of the things of the world; that would be impossible; but rather the proper use of them. God created the world and all that is in it for the use of man, hence a proper use of earthly things cannot be detrimental. The abuse is the excessive and improper use of them. When a man becomes so enamored and engrossed in this world's concerns as to neglect his soul, then it is that he is worldly and in grave danger of losing his soul.

Resolution: "Many things must thou pass by with a deaf ear, and think rather of those things which appertain to thy peace."

Conclusion: "Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that, ever fixing our thoughts on reasonable things, we may both in word and in deed do what is pleasing to Thee." (*Missal,* Prayer for the 6th Sunday after Epiphany).

OCTOBER 15

FLATTERY

Detraction and calumny are sinful and injurious but flattery is even more insidious. Flattery comes from seeming friends, whereas detraction and calumny come from an open enemy. Flattery is pleasing and apt to entice the soul, detraction and calumny are displeasing and odious. "Who is the man who is able to keep himself so warily, and with so much circumspection in all things, as not sometimes to fall into deceit and perplexity?"

We are what we are in the eyes of God, and not what men say or think us to be. "We are men, but frail men, though by many we are reputed and called angels." As soon as we begin to believe the flattering praises of men concerning us, we begin to grow proud, and by their praises, our virtues lose their lustre through the breath of flattery, and may be lost entirely.

As we must be wary of flattery given to us, also must we avoid flattering others. The fault is no less bad in ourselves than it is in others, "Oh, how good a thing, and how peaceable it is to be silent of others, nor to believe all that is said, nor easily to report what one has heard; to lay oneself open to few; always to seek Thee, the Beholder of the heart; not to be carried about with every wind of words, but to wish that all things both within and without us may go according to the pleasure of Thy will."

If you see good in your neighbor, rejoice and thank the Lord. Rather than praise him for it, praise the Lord. If someone discovers good in your, and as far as you can see it is a virtue in your soul, do you also thank the Lord for it, and be

prompt in acknowledging that any good that may be in you is there only through the goodness of God.

Resolution: "Give to my mouth truth and constancy in my words, and remove far from me a crafty tongue."

Conclusion: "To whom shall I give credit, O Lord? To whom but to Thee? Thou art the truth which neither can deceive nor be deceived."

OCTOBER 16

CRITICISM

Criticism is twofold that which we receive and that which we give. To the latter we shall devote but few words. An humble man never criticizes, except where criticism is constructive and productive of good.

As for being criticized, it may be hard to bear, but it is a powerful means of virtue. It makes a man realize that he is by no means perfect, and if he be sincere with himself, he will investigate whether the criticism be not justified, and if he finds that it is, as oftentimes he will, then he has reason to be grateful, for we are blind to our own faults. When criticism stings you, "if guilty, think that you will willingly amend yourself. If your conscience accuse you not, think that you will willingly suffer this for God's sake." In either case it is an opportunity for the practice of humility. But if "you are unwilling to be humbled and confounded for your defects, it is plain indeed that you are not truly humble, nor truly dead to the world, nor the world crucified to you."

Only after a man has trained himself to be indifferent to the opinions of others, whether expressed in criticism or not, will he enjoy peace of mind and the approval of his conscience. This does not at all mean that he should be indiffer-

ent in his actions and in the manner of performing them. He must consider the all-seeing eye of God and strive with all his might to have His approval in what he does and in the way he does it. Looking only to the good pleasure of his Heavenly Master, "if anything be wrongfully pronounced against him, the good man will not much care: neither will he vainly rejoice if by others he be reasonably excused. . . . For God is the judge and discerner of all secrets, He knows how the matter passes; He knows him that offers the injury and him that suffers it."

Resolve to "give ear to God's word, and you shall not value ten thousand words of men."

Conclusion: "O Lord God, just Judge, strong and patient, who knowest the frailty and perverseness of men, be Thou my strength and all my confidence."

OCTOBER 17

EXCELSIOR

The labors and the trials of life at times bear heavily on the soul. The need of incessant watchfulness lest we fall into sin, the interminable effort to practise virtue, and the still more trying task of retaining that which we have acquired with great effort, requires no small amount of zeal and perseverance. Viewed in itself, the tediousness of a continual watch upon ourselves, the unremitting grind of always striving to do the right thing, the constant thought to persevere may at times, especially for those not yet grounded in virtuous habits and the exercise of a devout life, cast the soul down and cause discouragement. Then is the time to look upward. "Peace shall come in one day, which is known to the Lord; and it shall not be a vicissitude of night and day, such as is at present; but everlasting light, infinite brightness,

steadfast peace, and secure rest. . . . Write, read, sing, sigh, keep silence, pray, bear thy crosses manfully; eternal life is worthy of all these and greater combats."

When, because of the faithful pursuit of virtue, you may not gain the possessions of the world in the same measure as those who are less scrupulous in doing right, when perhaps, because of your conscientiousness you are less esteemed by the children of the world, nay at times even contemned, look up to Heaven and confidently await the reward and the joy that will be yours upon your departure from this vale of tears. "Oh! if thou hadst seen the everlasting crowns of the saints in Heaven, and in how great glory they now triumph who appeared contemptible in this world, and in a manner even unworthy of life, doubtless thou wouldst immediately cast thyself down to the very earth, and wouldst rather seek to be under the feet of all, than to have command over so much as one. Neither wouldst thou covet the pleasant days of this life, but wouldst rather be glad to suffer tribulation for God's sake, and esteem it thy greatest gain to be reputed as nothing among men."

Resolution: "Mind what thou art about, labor faithfully, and I will be thy reward."

Conclusion: "Lift up, therefore, thy face to Heaven. Behold I and all my saints with Me, who in this world have had a great conflict, do now rejoice, are now secure, are now at rest, and they shall for all eternity abide with Me in the kingdom of God."

OCTOBER 18

DESIRE FOR HEAVEN

When one is tired of the things of this world, which are found time and again to be devoid of genuine and lasting

pleasure; when the very necessities of life grow burdensome, then must the thoughts of the Christian turn towards Heaven. He will then realize that "the days of this life are short and evil, full of sorrows and miseries; where man is defiled with many sins, is ensnared with many passions, attacked with many fears, disquieted with many cares, distracted with many curiosities, entangled with many vanities, and encompassed with many errors, broken with many labors, troubled with temptations, weakened with delights, tormented with want." His faith and hope in God then stand him in good stead, he sees the futility of earthly joys and turns his desires to the joys of Heaven. He may rightly exclaim: "O most happy mansion of the city above! O bright day of eternity, which knows no night, but is always enlightened by the sovereign Truth! a day always joyful, always secure, and never changing its state for the contrary! Oh, that this day would shine upon us, and all those temporal things would come to an end!"

Together with this thought the recollection of one's sinfulness, frailty, and weakness will naturally arise. "Oh, when will there be an end to these evils? When shall I be set at liberty from the wretched slavery of sin? . . . I desire to cleave to heavenly things, but the things of this life and my unmortified passions bear me down." And yet despite all this sin and inclination to sin, the most merciful God has promised the truly repentant forgiveness of sin and life everlasting. How confidently ought we grasp that promise and how earnestly ought we to yearn for the joy of Heaven! Would that we had a veritable homesickness for Heaven, for Him that constitutes the joy of Heaven, Christ, our Lord!

Resolution: Long to enjoy God in Heaven.

Conclusion: "When, O Lord, shall I be with Thee in Thy Kingdom, which Thou hast prepared for Thy beloved from all eternity?"

OCTOBER 19

STRIFE BETWEEN THE SPIRIT AND THE BODY

In view of the fact that Heaven is so desirable, it would seem to be easy to keep our thoughts centered on the joys of the heavenly court and to keep our deeds ever directed to the end that one day we shall attain it. Alas! the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. "Thus, unhappy man that I am, I fight with myself, and am become burdensome to myself, whilst the spirit seeks to tend upwards, and the flesh downwards."

Willingly would the good and devout man fill his mind with the thoughts of Heaven and perform his actions in a manner to make himself worthy, as far as that is possible for a mortal; but the necessities of life, the allurements of the world, and the rebellion of the flesh, hold him back, make his thoughts earthly, and often drag him into sin. "I am willing in mind to be above all things, but by the flesh I am obliged against my will to be subject to them." And even when I succeed in concentrating my thoughts and desires on Heaven, I am not long in peace before I am disturbed and confused by reason of the worldly and unholy thoughts which force themselves upon me. "Oh! what do I suffer interiorly, whilst in my mind I consider heavenly things and presently a crowd of carnal thoughts comes to interrupt my prayer!"

However, this should not make us anxious, as it is but a proof of the weakness of human nature brought on by the sin of our First Parents. By constant endeavor we will be able to overcome these drawbacks, and although perhaps not entirely, yet to a good degree, we shall be able to keep our thoughts and actions directed towards Heaven. As we in-

crease in love for Him who constitutes Heaven, we will also grow in our intense desire to be with Him in Heaven. "When, O Lord, shall I be happy as to think of Thee alone? When shall I rejoice to the full in Thee?"

Resolve ever to detach yourself from worldly things and to cast your thoughts and desires on Heaven.

Conclusion: "O good Jesus, when shall I stand to behold Thee! . . . All my desire is after Thee. . . . I long to enjoy Thee intimately, but cannot attain to it."

OCTOBER 20

DISTRACTIONS

It is sad, but nevertheless true, that much of our prayer and meditation loses its effect because we fail to concentrate our thoughts upon what we are doing. Rightly may we ask the Lord: "Pardon me and mercifully forgive me the times that I have thought of anything else in prayer besides Thee. For I confess truly that I am accustomed to be very much distracted: for oftentimes I am not where I am bodily standing or sitting, but am rather there where my thoughts carry me." However, although this difficulty is partly a result of the weakness of human nature brought on by the sin of our First Parents, yet it may be overcome by intensive effort to keep our attention fixed on what we are doing. With the help obtained by grace, a habit of genuine recollection in prayer can be formed. Often may we pray: "Gather my senses to Thee, O Lord; make me forget all worldly things." The result may be adjudged from the success which the saints obtained by such petitions and their firm determination.

It is also consoling to remember that distractions that are not wilful are neither sinful nor can they spoil a prayer as

long as they are resisted and not allowed to remain in the mind. Thus it may happen that much of the time intended for prayer may be spent in driving away distracting thoughts. Such prayer is not displeasing to God; on the contrary, it will be replete with merit, because the good God does not look so much for a perfect prayer from us as to our efforts to please Him in striving to pray well. No less are to be contemned evil thoughts, which may attack the mind even in the holiness of prayer. Here, too, we may pray the Lord: "Give me grace speedily to cast away and to despise all wicked imaginations."

Resolve to strive manfully against distractions in prayer.

Conclusion: "Cleanse my heart, O Lord, from all vain, evil, and distracting thoughts, that I may worthily, attentively, and devoutly raise my heart and mind in prayer to Thee."

OCTOBER 21

LOVES

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Luke VI, 45). Our dear Lord and Master means by these words that a man's heart will be betrayed by his conversation. Not only by his speech (the most ordinary way), but also by his every external action, will he, upon occasion, disclose the web and texture of his character. "For whatsoever things I love, of the same I willingly speak and hear, and carry home with me the images of them." If I had to judge of the interests of my neighbor, I should try to hear him speak often. The tenor of his conversation would give me an indication of his loves and likes, his ambitions and aims. Very few men are able entirely to veil from others in intimate association the inner secrets of their hearts. "That thing

most readily comes to my mind which naturally delights me, or which through custom is pleasing to me."

What is much in my mind will either readily be communicated to others or if it is sought to be concealed, is very apt to be disclosed inadvertently, because of the very intensity and frequency of these thoughts in the soul. "If I love Heaven, I shall willingly think on heavenly things." My speech and my actions will agree with the thoughts in my mind. "If I love the world, I rejoice in the prosperity of the world, and am troubled at its adversity." The seeking of wealth will occupy my lips and my actions; and the more one is given to this pursuit, the less place will there be in his heart for spiritual things. "If I love the flesh, my imagination is often taken up with the things of the flesh." My own convenience and comfort will engage my attention almost to the exclusion of supernatural interests. "But if I love the spirit, I delight to think of spiritual things," which will unconsciously be expressed in word and deed in my daily life.

Resolution: "Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven. . . . For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also." (Matt. VI, 20–21).

Conclusion: "O God, before whom all hearts are open, and to whom all desires are known, and from whom no secret is hidden; purify the thoughts of our hearts, that we may love Thee perfectly and worthily magnify Thy holy Name."

OCTOBER 22

HEAVEN, OUR HOME

For anyone who has attained to a fervent love of our Blessed Saviour, and has tasted the sweetness of that love,

this world and its petty affairs become distasteful. More and more, as the love of Jesus grows, the soul assumes the attitude of St. Paul toward life, "having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ." To possess this longing to be with Christ in eternal bliss, if it proceeds from love of Him and not from impatience or some other sinful motive, is a grace from above. "When thou perceivest a longing after eternal bliss to be infused into thee from above, and that thou desirest to go out of the dwelling of the body, that thou mayest contemplate My brightness, without any shadow of change dilate thy heart, and with all thy affection embrace this holy inspiration."

This desire, however, is never genuine and sincere unless there is a true detachment from the things of this world. One cannot really be desirous of Heaven if bound by earthly affections. The only consideration that can make this world tolerable for the ardent lover of Jesus, is the honor which may be shown Him here by a whole-hearted performance of the divine will, and the good that may be done to one's neighbor in bringing him to the love of God. We must be on our guard not to mistake a desire to die and thus be relieved of the burdens and hardships of life, for a desire to be with our Blessed Lord and Saviour in Heaven. The former very often proceeds from discouragement and impatience, whereas the latter is spiritual and is not infected with any impatience. It is true that the desire to be with God includes relief from temporal vicissitudes, but it does not spring from this motive, but rather from the love of Him and a desire to be united with Him and never to lose Him.

Resolution: "Return thanks to the divine bounty, which deals so favorably with thee, which mercifully visits thee, ardently incites thee, and powerfully raises thee up."

Conclusion: "O God, who hast prepared good things unseen for those who love Thee, pour into our hearts the fer-

vor of Thy love, that, loving Thee in all things, we may obtain Thy promises, which surpass all desire."

OCTOBER 23

TIMES OF TRIAL

Intense as the desire of Heaven may be, Heaven cannot be enjoyed in this life. Now is the time of trial, the time to prove that we are deserving of Heaven, as far as that is humanly possible. Therefore, we must not expect to be free from trials and hardships, for in the proper acceptance and endurance of these consists the proof of our love of and dependence upon God. We will often be called upon to suffer that which is repugnant to our nature; we shall experience many times that that which is undertaken by others is successful, whilst that which we attempt is unsuccessful. "That which others say shall be hearkened to; what you say shall not be regarded." What others ask is granted, what you ask is refused. Some may rise to fame; you are committed to obscurity. Your neighbor is entrusted with many offices and good works; you are ignored. "At this, nature will sometimes repine, and it will be no small matter if thou bear it with silence."

These are cases where we must do violence to ourselves in order to overcome what is naturally repugnant to us. "In these and many such like things, the faithful servant of the Lord is used to be tried, how far he can renounce himself and break himself in all things." If he succeed in this, he will have a foretaste of Heaven already here on earth, but the less successful he is, the less will he enjoy that peace of mind which is a consequence rather of overcoming ourselves than of having all things according to our will. The secret of suc-

cess in this matter is a generous acquiescence in the will of God. "Not my will be done, but Thine." This is a part of the joy of Heaven, that God's will is done perfectly there, as may be seen from what is said in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

Resolution: "What, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Conclusion: "Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that, ever fixing our thoughts on reasonable things, we may both in word and deed do what is pleasing to Thee." (*Missal,* Prayer for the sixth Sunday after Epiphany).

OCTOBER 24

REWARD OF HEAVEN

Whatever hardship or suffering may be brought upon us by conforming to the will of God in all things, will be amply rewarded in Heaven. "There no man shall resist thee, no man shall complain of thee, nothing shall stand in the way of thee; but all that thou desirest shall be there together present, and shall replenish thy whole affection and satiate it to the full." If you were despised and contemned in this life, there you will enjoy eternal glory. If you had many sorrows in this life and bore them resignedly, there you will have much praise. If your life was spent in obscurity, but you were faithful in honoring and glorifying God, there you will be placed in the high places to enjoy eternal honor because of your humility. The obedience you practised during life, which at times may have been irksome, you will now be amply repaid for, since even the most insignificant actions will have their reward. The pain of penance will now be turned to pleasure. The return for humble submission to

superiors will be a corresponding elevation in the realms of Heaven. "Bow down humbly at present under the hands of all, and heed not who it was who has said or commanded this. But let it be thy care that, whether thy superior or inferior or equal desire anything of thee, or hint at anything, thou take all in good part, and labor with a sincere will to perform it." Others may seek the honors of this world for their seeming advantage, others' lives may seem replete with every joy; possessions and position may be their lot in life; but as for your part accept the hardships and humiliations which may come to you without complaint for your reward will be exceedingly great. "This is what thou oughtest to wish, that, whether in life or death, God may always be glorified in thee."

Resolution: "Take courage and be valiant, as well in doing as in suffering things repugnant to nature."

Conclusion: "O Lord, Jesus Christ, who didst come down to earth from Heaven, from the bosom of the Father, and didst pour out Thy Precious Blood for the remission of sins, we humbly beseech Thee that, on the day of judgment, we may be considered worthy to hear: 'Come ye blessed of My Father.' " (*Missal,* Mass of the Passion).

OCTOBER 25

DESOLATION

Only a very great love of God and an earnest desire to imitate our Blessed Saviour in His sufferings will bear up the soul in times of spiritual desolation. "Sometimes," says St. Francis de Sales in his treatise *Of the Love of God,* "the soul

is so overwhelmed with inward trouble that its every faculty seems crushed, without any hope of relief. Then, like our Lord, the soul is 'sore distressed and very heavy, even unto death,' and it asks that, if possible, the cup may pass away, one thing only being clear to it as it holds on to God's good pleasure, namely, that it desires above all 'not my will, but Thine be done!' " So keenly is such spiritual desolation felt that, with Jesus on the cross, the soul is inclined to cry out: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Mark XV, 34). Despite the lack of consolation, the soul will with all its power resign itself to God's holy will, although "amid such tribulation the soul is so distraught that it is scarcely conscious of its resignation, or imagines it to be so feeble as hardly to be worthy of God's acceptance."

This is a sore trial for souls advanced in the love of God, for souls who are heroic and generous in God's service. Those less tried and less generous would break under the ordeal.

To be thus tried, then, is a sign of God's special acceptance of our love, and if the trial is accepted humbly and gratefully by us, it is one of the best means of making giant strides on the way to perfection. A soul in such desolation ought to pray unceasingly: "O Lord God, O holy Father, be Thou now and forever blest; for as Thou wilt, so it has happened; and what Thou dost, is always good." It is well, too, to pray for the removal of this trial, if it be God's holy will, or at least for the strength to bear it faithfully, repeating often: "I long for the joy of peace; I beg for the peace of Thy children, who are fed by Thee in the light of Thy consolation."

Resolution: "Thou knowest what is expedient for my progress, and how serviceable tribulation is to rub away the rust of sin; do with me according to Thy good pleasure."

Conclusion: "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke XXIII, 46).

OCTOBER 26

HELP IN DESOLATION

Although the soul may be inclined to think that it has been abandoned by God, nevertheless faith will not allow such a thought to become a conviction, for just as we know that the sun is in the sky, no matter how overcast it may be with heavy clouds, so we must know by faith that, no matter how dark and gloomy the mood of the soul may be, God is somewhere, near in the background, In our seeming dereliction, there is no other to whom we may turn than the same good Master who seems to be so far away. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." (John VI, 69). "There is none can comfort me but Thou, O Lord, my God, the heavenly physician of souls, who woundest and healest, bringest down to hell and leadest back again."

How often this trial is a blessing in disguise! The infidelity in His service, the pride and self-complaisance that creep into the soul almost inperceptibly, are recognized and realized, checked and corrected during a time of desolation, which might otherwise pass unnoticed. Instead of discouragement and despair, gratitude and humility ought to well up in our hearts, for serious self-examination will show us that a period of desolation may be to our advantage in furthering humility and zeal for our spiritual perfection. Well may we say to our dear Lord: "Thou knowest everything, and there is nothing in a man's conscience hidden from Thee." We often hide our faults from ourselves, our little infidelities in God's service, our want of zeal, our love of creature comforts, our ambitions and vain glories, but in a time of desolation, if we are sincere with ourselves, they will come conspic-

uously before the mind's eye. We shall have to admit that this trial is not entirely undeserved and unmerited. Happy the man who profits by it!

Resolution: "To Thee I commit myself and all that is mine, to be corrected by Thee; it is better to be chastised here than hereafter."

Conclusion: "O Father, worthy of all love, it is fitting that Thy servant at this hour should suffer something for Thee."

OCTOBER 27

RIGHT JUDGMENT

"Suffer me not to judge according to the sight of the outward eyes, nor to give sentence according to the hearing of the ears of men who know not what they are about; but to determine both visible and spiritual matters with true judgment, and, above all things, ever seek Thy good will and pleasure." The senses are apt to give false impressions of the value of things; they incline man to judge according to the flesh. "The sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand." (1 Cor. II, 14). Very cautiously, then, must we be in judging of the value of things perceived by the senses. They are valuable only in as much as they can be of benefit for man's spiritual life, in as far as they may be made to yield some spiritual fruit. "The lovers of this world are deceived in loving visible things alone." They value only that which can satisfy a present need, gratify a desire now in the heart, or content a passing whim. No place is given to a value beyond the present. Hence "the sentiments of men are often wrong in their judgments. . . . One deceitful man deceives another, the vain deceives the vain, the blind de-

ceives the blind, the weak the weak, whilst he extols him." The opinions of men may be as erroneous as the judgments formed by means of the senses. A spiritual man judges in the light of revelation as propounded by the Church. He judges by the eye of faith rather than by that of the body. He looks to men of well known spirituality to gather the value of things as disclosed by the valuation they put upon them. The Holy Spirit, too, will guide the prayerful man in the right estimate of things, for, "we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is of God; that we may know the things that are given us from God." (1 Cor. II, 12).

Resolution: "Judge all things in the light of faith."

Conclusion: "Grant, O Lord, that I may know what I ought to know; that I may love what I ought to love; that I may praise that which is most pleasing to Thee; that I may esteem that which is valuable in Thy sight."

OCTOBER 28

TENSION

A generous soul inspired by zeal and ardent love of God will plan and execute many good works for the honor and glory of God and for the welfare of his neighbor. He will aspire to a high degree of perfection and use every effort to attain it. Constant prayer and consistent penance will be given due place in his life. The mind and heart will be set on Heaven and there will be an unremitting effort to keep the soul recollected.

Such zeal for the honor of God and for sanctity will cause a tension between the soul and the body, for conduct so enlightened and lofty is contrary to the demands of corrupted nature, and hence there is a continual strife be-

tween the superior faculties of the soul and the unreasonable desires of the body loaded with the concupiscences brought on it by the sin of Adam. Therefore, "you cannot always continue in the most fervent desire of virtue, nor stand in the highest degree of contemplation; but it must needs be that you sometimes descend to lower things by reason of original corruption; and that you bear the burden of this corruptible life, even against your will and with irksomeness." Often, then, you will be obliged to come down from the elevated plane of contemplation and the consequent joy and peace of spiritual recollection, to suffer with patience the prosaic tasks of gaining your sustenance, of nursing a sick body back to health, of performing menial labor for a neighbor without an inspiring thought, of praying without the least pleasure, of continuing in the practice of virtue without joy or consolation in its performance. "You ought, therefore, as long as you are in the flesh, oftentimes bewail the burden of the flesh, for that you cannot without intermission be employed in spiritual exercises and divine contemplation . . . and to bear with patience your banishment and the aridity of your mind, till you be visited again by God and delivered from all anguish."

Resolution: "In your patience you shall possess your souls." (Luke XXI, 19).

Conclusion: "Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee."

OCTOBER 29

THE CONTRITE HEART

Desirable as it may be, we have no right to the consolation that Our Blessed Lord and Saviour bestows upon those who love Him. In looking back over our lives, we shall find that

we have not done that which might dispose us for this favor, but rather the opposite, making ourselves unworthy of it. As far back as we can recall we have been committing sins, the most hateful thing that can be done against Our dear Lord. They started with lesser offences and perhaps, as the years went on, increased in gravity and in number. "Therefore, according to all just reason, I have not deserved the least of God's comforts. But Thou, who art a good and merciful God, who wilt not have Thy works perish, to show the richness of Thy goodness towards the vessels of mercy, vouchsafest beyond all his deserts to comfort Thy servant beyond human measure."

When we are without spiritual comfort, let us acknowledge to ourselves and to God that we are most unworthy of it, and that we are deservedly punished for our many sins against God who is so liberal in His goodness and so long-suffering in His justice. When favored with spiritual joy and consolation, let us be full of confusion, of humility, and contrition for sin, knowing as we do that our sins should rightly prevent so great a grace that proceeds from His exceeding kindness alone towards His unworthy children. Amidst this comfort given you, humbly acknowledge and confess: "I have not the face to say anything but this one word: I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned; have mercy on me and pardon me. . . . In true contrition and humility of heart is brought forth hope of forgiveness, a troubled conscience is reconciled, grace that was lost is recovered, man is secured from the wrath to come, and God meets the penitent soul in the holy kiss of peace."

Resolution: "Lord I am not worthy of Thy consolation, or of any spiritual visitation; and therefore Thou dealest justly with me when Thou leavest me poor and desolate."

Conclusion: "Sweetest Jesus, grant me an increase of faith, hope, and charity, a contrite and humble heart."

OCTOBER 30

SOLITUDE

He who would rejoice in the Lord and taste how sweet is his service, must more and more withdraw from the things of this world and keep his thoughts ever more steadily fixed on God. Such conduct is opposed to the dictates of weak human nature and at first thought may seem unreasonable. However, God's grace is so precious that it allows itself not to be mingled with external things, or earthly consolations, "for you cannot both attend to God, and at the same time delight yourself in transitory things." He who seeks perfection will try to be alone and communicate with God rather than to be in company and communicate with men. However, in this too, reason must be respected. When charity towards our neighbor requires, or when personal relaxation is necessary, or when the cause of God may be promoted, the company of others is to be preferred to solitude. What is advisable for those in the world is, that they be not opposed to solitude when it comes to them naturally, or when they may without violating any demand of charity easily secure it for themselves. As the author of *The Following of Christ* says: "Choose a secret place to yourself; love to dwell with yourself alone; seek not to be talking with anyone; but rather pour forth devout prayers to God, that you may keep your mind in compunction, and your conscience clean."

There may be little opportunity for solitude in the life of the average man, yet he ought to love it and never avoid it when it does come. Some think they can be happy only when associating with others. This may be true. What is here advocated is that the devout man seek to substitute for the

company of his friends that of his Blessed Lord. Of the two, the latter is more consoling, more resourceful of genuine joy, more productive of spiritual good, more satisfying, and promising of future joy.

Resolution: "Prefer attendance on God before all external things."

Conclusion: "My God and my all!"

OCTOBER 31

RENUNCIATION OF SELF

To renounce the company of men, in as far as that is not incongruous with our station of life, is no easy task. "An infirm soul is not yet capable of having a heart thus perfectly disengaged from all things, neither doth the sensual man understand the liberty of an internal man." It seems to him to be impossible for a man to be happy, were he to cut himself off from the association of men, as far as he possibly can, without transgressing the laws governing man's duties to society. The reason why he cannot understand is because he has not yet learned how to associate with his Blessed Lord and Master, and has not yet tasted the joy of union with God. "But if he will be spiritual indeed, he must renounce as well those that are near to him, as those that are afar off, and beware of none more than of himself."

Writers on spiritual subjects are agreed that the greatest hindrance to a spiritual life is an inordinate love of self. Man, left to himself, will seek the gratification of his own desires and the fulfillment of his own will. "The perfect victory is to triumph over self. For he that keeps himself in subjection, so that his sensuality is ever subject to reason,

and reason in all things obedient to God, he is indeed a conqueror of himself and lord of all the world." Hence a man, to be spiritual, must begin by renouncing himself, curbing his desires, and gratifying only those which are compatible with the will of God. He must ever more and more seek to discover the will of God in his regard and strive to bring his will in unison with that of his beloved Master. At first this will be difficult, but as he progresses in his endeavor, he will find that the will of God is sweet and benevolent and there is by far more peace and happiness in following the will of God than there is in gratifying his own.

Resolution: "Not my will, but Thine be done." (Luke XXII, 42).

Conclusion: "Lord, I desire that in all things Thy will may be done because it is Thy will, and in the manner that Thou willest."

NOVEMBER 1

DECEPTION

How often is man deceived by that which seems to be genuine, but upon closer inspection proves to be an imitation. So, too, in the spiritual life, what is thought to be virtue is often found to be but an imitation of it. "All men aim at good, and pretend to something of good in what they do and say: therefore, under the appearance of good many are deceived." There is a semblance of good in practically every man, and only after he is more intimately known, may it be discerned whether the goodness be genuine virtue or merely a substitute for virtue. This apparent good is a mantle donned for the purpose of appearances.

Except in the thoroughly depraved, an appearance of goodness and a reputation for virtue is sought by every one. So true is this, that some begin to think themselves genuinely good from a very habit of shamming. "Nature is crafty, and draws away many, ensnares them and deceives them, and always intends herself for her end." She wishes the counterfeit good for the sake of the opinion of others, for the right to associate with the genuinely good, for the purpose of gaining an advantage over the good, for the glow it brings to their hearts, for the soothing of a sin-laden soul.

True virtue or goodness is quite the opposite. It has the qualities which St. Paul attributes to charity: "It is patient, is kind, it envieth not, dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up; is not ambitious, seeketh not its own; is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." In a word, the soul that possesses true goodness, "does all things purely for God, in whom also she rests as in her last end."

Resolution: Observe diligently the motives of nature and grace and seek always to have the latter.

Conclusion: "Let the operation of Thy mercy, we beseech Thee, O Lord, direct our hearts, for without Thee we cannot please Thee." (*Missal,* Prayer for the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost).

NOVEMBER 2

NATURE AND GRACE

Following the dictates of our nature without the guidance of faith, we find that it would lead us to a course of action

which has no place in it for mortification. According to a merely natural way of living, all the urges of the senses ought to be gratified except perhaps such as may do the individual harm. To enjoy life to the fullest is the modern slogan. No restraint is to be tolerated. The only restraint considered is that which curbs excesses, lest these should injure the perpetrator physically, making pleasure thereafter impossible. To be ruled either by physical or moral force from within or without is considered a calamity, and to be forced to be obedient to a higher authority than one's own will is thought the greatest of evils. The only thing comparable with it is to be constrained in some dingy prison, where all liberty is banished. This is the life, thought, and ideal of those who have no spiritual enlightenment and live only according to nature. Grace, on the contrary, studies the mortification of self. Grace understands well that satisfying pleasure is not to be found in evil, no matter how much the senses may urge a gratification of their natural promptings. Restraint is demanded in what is lawful, lest there should be excess which is evil. Liberty is known to consist in overcoming the unlawful desires of a corrupted nature rather than being a slave to their persistent promptings. False are those teachers who, "promise liberty, whereas they themselves are the slaves of corruption. For by whom a man is overcome, of the same also is he a slave." (2 Peter II, 19). And as to obedience to rightful authority, grace teaches such obedience to be the best freedom, because as long as one is under obedience he is in the easiest, safest, and most contented way of fulfilling the will of God and thereby ensuring his own happiness here and hereafter."

Resolution: "Let not sin reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof." (Rom. VI, 12).

Conclusion: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor. III, 17).

NOVEMBER 3

PREFERENCE

Most every one can understand that the good of many ought to be preferred to the good of an individual. Yet in practical cases, the conduct of many a one is not in harmony with this principle. That one man should risk his life for the sake of saving the lives of many of his fellows is the conviction of all. However, in a crucial moment how many have the courage and love sufficient for their neighbor to do so? Those who do are hailed as heroes, those who shirk the duty are often times never known except by themselves. Nature, despoiled of its original goodness and nobleness by the sin of Adam and Eve, does not agree with the above principle. Despite the dictates of reason and the ideals of a lofty spirit, "nature labors for her own interest, and considers what gain she may reap from another." This is a subversion of what is good and noble, nevertheless it is the principle followed by those who are actuated only by what nature prompts.

Quite the contrary is the ideal and action of those whose motive is one prompted by grace. "Grace considers not what may be advantageous and profitable to herself, but rather what may be profitable to many." This does not mean to say that even those who have high incentives do not at times fail to live in accordance with them, however, a religious man has these thoughts and ideals habitually before him, and when he fails to comply with their demands, it is rather a matter of human weakness than a denial or a banishment of his high ideals. The necessity ever to overcome the promptings of weak human nature and to be ruled by the gentle

sway of grace, is at once apparent. The example of our dear Lord and Master as well as that of His saints is powerful aid in our endeavors. As the great St. Paul strove to be all to all, so must we, as our station in life permits, even to the forgetfulness of self, be profitable to our neighbor.

Resolution: "All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them." (Matt. VII, 12).

Conclusion: "O God, grant, that by Thy inspiration we may think those things which are right, and by Thy governance perform the same."

NOVEMBER 4

AMBITION

The dictionary defines ambition as an inordinate desire of power and distinction; and, secondly, as worthy eagerness to achieve something great and good. These two meanings of the word seem to be contradictory, though they agree very well with the spiritual idea of ambition, for there is a reprehensible ambition and a laudable ambition, either of which may have its source in the same heart. Persons imbued with the former kind of ambition seek position for the sake of being above others. They are prompted by pride. They willingly receive honor and respect and are much afraid of being put to shame and despised. The advantage of position stops with themselves, they rest in it, enjoy it and find a self-complacency in it that is disturbed only by the thought, that it may be taken from them. The latter kind of ambition is much different; it is prompted, encouraged, and sought for a

higher motive, namely, to honor God the more and to help one's neighbors more advantageously. Those possessed of this ambition attribute the honor or glory that may accompany their achievements entirely to God. If because of position they are called upon to suffer reproach, they do so willingly for the sake of Christ. They welcome such opportunities, knowing full well, how dangerous their position is spiritually, and how they need every opportunity offered to humble themselves, lest they fall victims to the sin of pride, which their position makes more perilous, than it would be for the ordinary man of the world. If ambition is good the possessor must understand that it is necessary to have the interior man in keeping with what position would have the exterior man to be; for almighty God judges according to the interior. To strive for God's sake and for His advantage is a virtue; to do the same for our own sake alone is ignoble and selfish.

Resolution: "My Jesus, all for Thee."

Conclusion: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

NOVEMBER 5

LABOR

In consequence of original sin physical labor has become irksome. "By the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," because Adam disobeyed the command of God: "Cursed is the earth in thy work, and in labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life." (Gen. III, 17, 19). And no

more irksome is physical labor than serious mental labor. The body loves idleness and bodily rest. To labor is hard is tiresome, to be idle and to rest, is pleasant and soft, and nature always prefers the easy and pleasing.

It is true, that for many, labor has become a joy and a pleasure, but these results have followed rather as indirect rewards of labor. The rewards of faithful and painstaking labor are many. It buys ease, position, reputation, wealth, and these in turn bring natural happiness. Work for its own sake, however, is rarely loved. When labor does not lead to success or brings no reward, there are few that relish it. Man, therefore, yearns for a time and condition of rest, for this purpose he works so as to provide for long periods of rest or for such prosperity that labor will be unnecessary for him. "Grace," on the contrary, "cannot be idle, and willingly embraces labor." A spiritual and supernatural motive will keep a man always laboring. He never thinks that he does enough, or too much; the honor and glory of God is an end so large and comprehensive as to engage all the activities of his mind and body. He must either praise God by prayer and contemplation, or honor Him in the labor he performs for others for the love of God. The salvation of his own soul is of such great moment to him that he has no time to rest idly, for every day brings him nearer his goal. The very zealous begrudge even the time of sleep and of needed relaxation from the time they wish to spend in incessant labors for the love of God, their neighbor and their own souls.

Resolution: "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

Conclusion:

"All for the honor and glory of God."

NOVEMBER 6

FASTIDIOUSNESS

"Nature seeks to love things that are curious and fine, and does not care for things that are cheap and coarse." Our Lord playing upon this trait in human nature, when He praised the greatness of St. John the Baptist, asked the Jews what they went into the wilderness to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Those that are clothed in soft garments are to be found only in the houses of kings. (Matt. XI, 8). By which he intimates that a man who has position and wealth, craves for fine things. This is the fault of human nature, it is always seeking what is precious in order to make a display before men, what is soft and comfortable to pamper the body. It is hard to please nature. No sooner is one thing possessed, than there is already a desire for another. One comfort conceded, there is a hankering for luxury. Such a course, if followed for any length of time, leads to effeminacy, to many abuses and sins.

Christ proclaimed that "there has not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist." One of the reasons of this greatness was his austerity. "The same John had his garment of camels' hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins: and his meat was locusts and wild honey." (Matt. XI, 11 and III, 4).

Those who are governed by the principles of religion are simple in their tastes and willing to be deprived of fine things. "Grace is pleased with that which is plain and humble, rejects not coarse things, nor refuses to be clad in old clothes." The example of Christ and most of the saints is very remarkable in this regard. Nowhere do we read of nor observe a

fastidiousness in their manner or conduct; rather there is always simplicity and self-restraint. Learn from Christ, for "the servant is not greater than his lord." (John XIII, 16).

Resolution: "Bring forth therefore fruit, worthy of penance." (Matt. III, 8).

Conclusion: "Graciously pour Thy grace into our hearts, we beseech Thee, O Lord, that . . . we may withdraw our senses from harmful excesses." (*Missal,* Prayer for the Monday of the third week of Lent).

NOVEMBER 7

TREASURES

The greatest happiness visioned by the worldly-minded is the possession of abundant wealth, which will enable them to buy the ease and comforts of this life. Consequently they are almost exclusively taken up in the amassing of wealth, and their highest joy seems to be the accumulation of earthly goods. Logically, the losses they may suffer are amongst their foremost griefs. In time, some become disillusioned, but others grasp after this phantom of happiness all their lives, only to suffer pungent disappointment as death approaches. Blessed is the man who has not been thus deluded and, "has not gone after gold, nor put his trust in money nor in treasures" (Ecclus. XXXI, 8). He understands well that "riches shall not profit in the day of revenge: but justice shall deliver from death." (Prov. II, 4). He follows the admonition of our Blessed Saviour uttered in His Sermon on the Mount: "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust, and the moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves

do not break through nor steal. For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also." (Matt. VI, 19–21).

When the mind is set on Heaven, temporal possessions lose their attraction, "for grace attends to things eternal, and cleaves not to those which pass with time; neither is she disturbed with the loss of things, . . . for she places her treasure and her joy in Heaven, where nothing is lost." The treasures which we send on before us, are the merits gained in the state of grace by our good works, either in honoring God or in doing good to our neighbor, in thought, word or deed. "To do good, to be rich in good works, to give easily, to communicate to others, to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the true life" (Tim. VI, 18–19), this is the wisdom of the children of God.

Resolution: "Lay up to yourselves treasures in Heaven."

Conclusion: "Give me neither beggary nor riches, give me only the necessaries of life." (Prov. XXX, 9).

NOVEMBER 8

ALMSGIVING

Since the Fall man is inclined to be covetous. He is inordinately eager to acquire and to possess. He is more willing to take than to give. To what extent this fault may have taken root in the soul, must be judged by each individual for himself. Some because of training, example, and environment have acquired a love and habit of noble generosity. Others, following the promptings of their lower nature, become miserly. The working of grace in our hearts, however, makes genuine Christian charity blossom forth into almsgiving. "Grace is bountiful and open-hearted, avoids selfish-

ness, is contented with little, and judges it 'more happy to give than to receive.' " Now that our dear Lord and Master has spoken and has said that generosity to our fellowman is generosity toward Him ("Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me"; Mat. XXV, 40) there is only one reasonable thing to do, and that is to be as generous in aiding the poor with our means and our service, as our possessions and our state of life permit.

It was this thought that prompted many of the saints to sell all they had and distribute the proceeds to the poor. It is this motive which inspires men and women to dedicate their lives to the service of the poor and suffering. It is this ideal that enables all the many charities of the Church to go on, supported by the alms of generous men and women in the world. If a glass of cold water given in Christ's name will not go unrewarded, how much less a gift which is far more valuable? For works like these will Heaven be given, for Holy Scripture clearly says that Heaven is for those who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the needy, and care for the sick. How then can we listen to the promptings of nature rather than those of grace which offers a reward exceedingly great?

Resolution: "If thou have much, give abundantly; if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little." (Tob. IV, 9).

Conclusion: "All for Thee, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus."

NOVEMBER 9

SOCIETY

Society being a natural craving of the human heart, those

not ruled by spiritual motives will indulge this propensity to the utmost. They will seek not only amusement and distraction from the sterner duties of life in the society of others, but also comfort in sorrow, help in need, and refuge from every evil. Consequently, the company of others will be sought, the ways of polite society will be cultivated. Conversation, gait, manner, dress, all will be made conformable to the slavish rules of an exclusive body of people, separated from the rest of a community not so much because of any genuine superiority, as by an aloofness made possible by riches or superior education.

This required conformity to the conventional rules of society brings other faults in its train. There is much pampering of the body, many vanities, and much gadding about. He who wishes to be in the whirl of society must pay the price. Contrariwise, "grace draws to God and to virtue, renounces creatures, flies the world, hates the desires of the flesh, and restrains wandering." Grace finds company enough in the thoughts of God and His goodness when deprived of the society of others, and finds communion with God much more pleasing than communion with the world. Instead of cultivating a manner satisfactory to the children of the world, the good follow the simple ways of sincere brotherly love unaffectedly flowing from hearts imbued with the love of God, upon which brotherly love is founded. The culture of beauty in person or dress is deemed pride, instead the beauty which should deck the soul is prized and sought. Solitude, when not uncharitable, is welcomed, loved and prized in preference to going about.

Resolution: " I have seen all things that are done under the sun, and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit." (Eccles. I, 2).

Conclusion: "My Lord and my all!"

NOVEMBER 10

COMFORT

By comfort is here meant spiritual comfort, which is a certain satisfaction which comes to the soul at times as a concomitant of spiritual exercises. Such solace does not necessarily accompany a good action, nor is its absence a sign that the action is not good. Perhaps most of our spiritual works are unaccompanied by spiritual comfort. Spirituality does not consist primarily in feelings, but rather in the intellect and in the will. To act virtuously merely for the emotions which are aroused, or because of a glow of feeling that spreads over the soul, is neither religious nor consistent, for as soon as the feelings are no longer aroused, the good works will be discontinued and often the path of righteousness abandoned.

Genuine spirituality consists in doing good because of the conviction that it is morally right and we are determined to honor and glorify God, no matter what the emotions or feelings may be that accompany our conduct. So consistent is the truly spiritual man that he continues in the good works he has resolved upon even though at times he experiences a great repugnance to performing them. The more frequently a good action is performed, the less is it apt to arouse spiritual comfort, for the more accustomed one becomes to spiritual reactions, the less are they calculated to stir up emotions and feelings. For this reason the spiritual man by his continuance in good gives proof that his actions are done for the love of God and not for the spiritual comfort that may arise from them. He also gives proof of his fidelity in the service of his Heavenly Master by his

perseverance, even when lacking inclination and comfort in its performance. Grace seeks God and His good pleasure alone, although it gratefully receives what comfort God may be pleased to give.

Resolution: "O Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, light of the world, I adore Thee, for Thee I live, for Thee I die."

Conclusion: "All for Thee, most Sacred Heart of Jesus."

NOVEMBER 11

HOW TO TEST THE GENUINE LOVE OF GOD

If a man seeks to please God, he will select such works as he knows will be most acceptable to His good pleasure; but if he seeks his own satisfaction, the pleasure of God will not be his aim, but rather what pleases himself. The work may be good in itself, however, if it is performed for the sake of one's own spiritual delight, certainly little thought is given to please God. Persons living in the world, who to the neglect of their daily duties seek to live as though they were members of some monastery or convent in order to serve God better, as they say, may be assured that it is self, not God, they are seeking to please. In the case of sickness, "if a man says that he desires health only that he may be better able to serve God, he deceives himslf—he is seeking health in the will of God, not the will of God in health." (St. Francis de Sales *Of the Love of God,* Bk. IX, Ch. 10).

Again when we pray, to be continually self-conscious, wondering whether we are praying with devotion or distractedly, is also a form of self-deception, for "if you are perpetually investigating your own mental attitude, you contemplate

yourself instead of God. He who prays fervently is scarce aware of it, for he is not thinking about his own prayer, but about God to whom he prays."

Is it God or ourselves that we are seeking throughout our entire spiritual life? There is danger of self-deception. This is evinced by the fact that "nature doth all for her own lucre and interest; she can do nothing gratis, but hopes to gain something equal or better, praise or favor for her good deeds, and covets to have her actions and gifts much valued. But grace seeks nothing temporal, nor requires any other recompense but God alone for her reward." Not the consolation of God but rather the God of consolation should be sought. When every thought and ambition is directed to the good pleasure of God, no matter what the result may be for the soul herself, then it may safely be said that God is being loved for His own sake.

Resolve to "aim as far as possible, to love God for Himself."

Conclusion: "Jesus, My God, I love Thee above all things."

NOVEMBER 12

RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

Human nature loves to possess many relatives and friends. It means, as a rule, to be known and recognized in a large circle of acquaintances, to have a wide sphere for intercourse, and to partake of the splendor of the achivements, reputation or position of those bound to us by the ties of blood or friendship. To attain these seeming advantages, many faults are

apt to be committed, among which are priding ourselves in our lineage and descent, a tendency to flatter the rich and those in higher positions, and a certain weakness in praising those on a level with ourselves, calculating thus to share in the reputed goodness of a class, whether or not we personally possess that gift. This is the way of the children of the world.

The children of light act otherwise. They do not limit their attention to relatives and friends. "Grace loves even her enemies, and is not puffed up with having many friends, nor attaches any value to family and birth, unless when joined with greater virtue; she rather favors the poor than the rich; she has more compassion for the poor than the rich; she favors the innocent rather than the powerful; she rejoices with him that loves the truth, and not with the deceitful; she ever exhorts the good to be zealous for better gifts, and to become like the Son of God by the exercise of virtue."

The sincere soul does not content herself with sharing in the aureole of glory surrounding a class, but seeks a glory, invisible perhaps to all except God, that issues from individual worth gained by personal endeavor. Like St. Paul, she desires to be all to all, be it to relatives and friends or to strangers and mere acquaintances, to rich or poor, to those in authority or to the lowly. In a word, her charity is universal like the charity of her Divine Master Himself.

Resolution: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Conclusion: "O God, to whom alone is known the number of Thine elect, whose happy lot it will one day be to be numbered among Thy saints: by their intercession grant, we beseech Thee, that in the book of the blessed predestination may be written the names of those who have been commended to our prayers, nay more, the names of all Thy faithful." (*Missal,* Secret for Ash Wednesday).

NOVEMBER 13

WANT AND POVERTY

There are wants which no riches can supply. There is a poverty that wealth cannot relieve. One person, rich in the goods of this world, may want a child upon whom to lavish his love and to whom at death he may bequeath his riches. Another, though blessed with wealth, is lacking an education, which he had no opportunity to obtain when a youth, and which he is too old to acquire now. Still another lacks sociability, and thus the list may be prolonged. The poor sometimes have such a spirit of poverty that even the acquisition of wealth does not change the manner and course of their lives. There is no luxury, no wasteful lavishment of money, no display, but all is decency, simplicity, and generosity. Amidst wealth, there is a poverty in spirit which in the use of riches never exceeds the right measure and is always in keeping with God's holy will and counsels. "In temporal matters, he is never satisfied who is not content with sufficiency, for what can satisfy endless craving." (St. Francis de Sales, *On the Love of God,* Bk. VIII, 7).

So whether it be for a want that cannot possibly be supplied, or for one which could be, but is not, because of a lack of means, the way to preserve peace of mind and spiritual happiness, is to banish all desires for it and to be satisfied and contented with what we have without craving for more or for something else. "Nature easily complains of want and trouble: but grace bears poverty with constancy." The soul is made uneasy by useless and impossible desires. To wish for what we have not, instead of being content with what we

have, is the cause of much discontent and lack of peace. Many of the distractions in our prayers and spiritual exercises come from an unbridled mind, which is allowed to roam the field of desires, instead of being restrained by the will of God.

Resolution: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."

Conclusion: "Let the ears of Thy mercy, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy suppliants, that Thou mayest grant their desires to them, and make them ask for those things only that are pleasing to Thee." (*Missal,* Prayer for the ninth Sunday after Pentecost).

NOVEMBER 14

SELF-CONCEIT

The child whose father bears the weight of some article which the child is seemingly lifting, thinks that he is lifting it. How different is the fact! The self-conceited man, especially in the realms of the spiritual, thinks that he is accomplishing much by himself. Here too, how different is the truth! Deceiving himself by results, perhaps, he believes that he is doing what is principally the work of God, in which at most he can only co-operate. He ascribes to his own efforts things which cannot possibly be performed by human effort. He defends himself, argues and makes himself ridiculous to all reasonable men. And often, though everyone of his fellow-men sees his vanity and egotism, he himself is blind to it.

The course of those aided by grace is quite the contrary. "Grace refers all things to God, from whom all originally proceed; she attributes no good to herself, nor does she arro-

gantly presume of herself: she does not contend, nor prefer her own opinion to others, but in every sense she submits herself to the eternal wisdom and to the divine examination." In whatever we do, whether it be physical, mental, or spiritual, we are dependent upon Divine Providence. Without God's concurrence we can neither move, think, nor pray. Hence there is every reason to ascribe nothing to ourselves. In things spiritual we must be prompted by God's grace without which we cannot begin, continue, or finish anything in the supernatural order. In the face of this truth, how foolish it is to claim credit for ourselves, when the whole is the work of grace, and we have only the merit of co-operation. "We are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God." (2 Cor. III, 5).

Resolution: "By the grace of God, I am what I am; and His grace in me hath not been void, but I have labored more abundantly than all they; yet not I, but the grace of God with me." (Cor. XV, 10).

Conclusion: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory." (Ps. CXIII, 1).

NOVEMBER 15

WORLDLY POPULARITY

The man or woman who would be popular in the world loves to engage in conversation, is an agreeable talker, has an amount of information more or less personal and intimate to divulge about his neighbor, can, when necessary, be a good listener and receives and stows away secrets of others. Such a one is willing to appear abroad and to have experience of many things. Social affairs are much sought after, and the more a person is invited to attend, the more popular he is

supposed to be. One of the best indices of a person's popularity is the frequency with which one is seen in so-called polite society. Naturally extreme care is taken as to dress and etiquette. A desire to be noticed is a prominent trait, and an endeavor to do such things as may procure praise and admiration is seldom lacking.

The way of grace is quite the contrary. "Grace cares not for the hearing of news and curious things, . . . she teaches to restrain the senses, to avoid vain complacency and ostentation, humbly to hide those things which are worthy of praise and admiration; . . . she desires not to have herself or what belongs to her extolled." Since what is considered desirable by the children of the world is as a rule diametrically opposed to what God values and counsels, few, if any, of the saints were popular among the children of the world during their life-time. The nearer we approach the ideal of what grace would have us be, the less will we desire the company of persons who live and appreciate this world only. The worldly-minded seek themselves, whereas the children of grace "seek in every thing and in every knowledge the fruit of spiritual profit, and the praise and honor of God."

Resolution: "Be not conformed to this world; but be reformed in the newness of your mind." (Rom. XII, 2).

Conclusion: "Sweet Heart of Jesus, be my love!"

NOVEMBER 16

ACTUAL GRACE

Actual grace is a supernatural gift of God which enlightens the mind and moves the will to do good and to shun evil. "It elevates a man from the things of the earth to the love of

heavenly things, and of carnal makes him spiritual." Grace gives a man quite a different attitude toward life and the things of this life. It raises him into a different sphere of thought and action. Much of what is accounted as desirable and valuable by the world at large is estimated as of little or no worth by the devout man. This attitude is not understood by those who have not this grace. The reason is because each has a different standard of measuring. The one values everything by the measure of the earthly happiness it affords, the other by the measure of eternal happiness which it merits. The one looks to the pleasure he can acquire for himself, the other to the pleasure his conduct will give to God.

But why this difference of standards? Where grace is present and effective, a supernatural view is taken of life, whereas, where grace is lacking or refused when offered, man is inclined to lean to the earthly. Grace is proffered to all men by God, but not all accept it and co-operate with it. The more faithfully we utilize the grace of God, the keener will be our insight into the value of earthly things. "Wherefore by how much the more nature is kept down and subdued, with so much greater abundance grace is infused; and the inward man by new visitations is daily more reformed according to the image of God." Through co-operating with God's grace, Matthew, the seeker of wealth, became a lover of apostolic poverty; Judas, on the contrary, by his resistance to grace became a miser and a deicide. To work with the grace of God is a mark of the elect and a pledge of eternal salvation.

Resolution: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." (Phil. IV, 13).

Conclusion: "Most merciful God, incline Thine ears to our prayers, and with the grace of the Holy Ghost enlighten our hearts, that we may worthily take part in Thy service,

and love Thee with an everlasting love." (*Missal,* Preparation for Holy Communion).

NOVEMBER 17

PRAYER FOR GRACE

Although every man receives sufficient grace to gain salvation, nevertheless, because of a thoughtless and careless use of grace, many are lost, and unless we replenish the supply of grace, we shall not have enough to save our soul.

Now the most common means of obtaining God's grace is prayer. We may pray "I perceive in my flesh the law of sin contradicting the law of my mind, and leading me captive to obey sensuality in many things; neither can I resist the passions, therefore, unless I am assisted by Thy holy grace, infused copiously in my heart." We must often, too, pray for the grace of light, to see what is right and to receive the necessary strength of will to do it. Many well disposed men and women lacking the light of grace do not discover the good which lies before them, and others, though aware of it, have not the moral strength to put it into execution.

There is both spiritual blindness and weakness caused a confusion in the soul resulting from the urgings of sensuality and the promptings of the passions. The grace of God is intended to remedy this evil by affording light and strength, but it must be sought, asked for, and appreciated. Some good people speculate why it is that they are not as spiritual-minded and virtuous as their associates. They do not see, they say, how they may better their lives or do more than what they are doing. Such a conviction proves how limited is their spiritual vision. They need to pray for more grace. The higher one ascends, the greater becomes the range

of vision. Similarly, the more grace one has received and utilized, the greater becomes his range of spiritual vision, showing new fields and new perfections to be acquired. As the man deprived of sight finds that his knowledge is limited, so the man lacking grace will experience that he has but a limited spiritual knowledge. With the blind man he may confidently beg: "Lord, that I may see."

Resolution: Pray for grace, for "the Lord will give grace and glory." (Ps. LXXX, 12).

Conclusion: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Rom. X, 13).

NOVEMBER 18

THE NATURE OF GRACE

Adam and Eve in their original state, as they were created by almighty God, were not only destined for a supernatural end, but were also endowed with supernatural gifts to enable them to attain this end, and they were given preternatural gifts as well, to facilitate the following out of their destination. They were in a state of innocence. This means, they were not only free from sin, but possessed justification and righteousness, which excluded the baneful influence of concupiscence upon the soul and the rebellion of the flesh against the spirit.

Now, it is the nature of grace to place man in this original state of our first parents, not in its entirety, but to a great extent. Sanctifying grace renders a man innocent and holy. Actual grace enlightens the mind darkened by sin. It aids man in overcoming the influence of concupscience, which,

although not taken away by grace, is nevertheless weakened in those of good will who constantly co-operate with the graces received. Besides, grace gives to the individual strength to rule over the rebellious flesh, even though it may never be fully brought under subjection.

Hence we see that "the first man, Adam, being corrupted by sin, the punishment of his sin has descended upon all mankind. So that nature itself, which by God was created good and right, is now put for the vice and infirmity of corrupt nature; because the motion thereof, left to itself, draws to evil and to things below; . . . therefore, we stand in need of God's grace, and of a great grace, to overcome nature, which is always prone to evil from youth." These facts explain how it is "that according to the inward man we are delighted with God's law, knowing His command to be good and just and holy, and reproving all evil and sin, as what ought to be shunned; yet in the flesh we serve the law of sin, whilst we rather obey sensuality than reason."

Resolution: "Receive not the grace of God in vain." (2 Cor. VI, 1).

Conclusion: "Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee." (Ps. LXXXIII, 6).

NOVEMBER 19

THE IMPORTANCE OF GRACE

Grace is so important for the soul because it is impossible to please God without it. Devoid of grace, we cannot be pleasing to God, no matter what other qualities of body or soul we may have. "No arts, no riches, no beauty nor

strength, no wit nor eloquence, are of any worth in the eyes of God without grace. For the gifts of nature are common to good and bad; but grace or divine love is the proper gift of the elect, as they that are adorned therewith are esteemed worthy of eternal life."

As no natural gift can take the place of grace to make a soul pleasing to God, so neither will any supernatural gift. "This grace is so excellent, that neither the gift of prophecy, nor the working of miracles, nor any speculation, how sublime soever, is of any value without it. Nor even faith, nor hope, nor any other virtue, are acceptable to God without charity and grace."

As it is impossible to please God without grace, it is impossible to perform any good action unaccompanied by grace. "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will." (Phil. II, 13). So dependent are we upon the help of God's grace, to do what is pleasing to Him, "that we are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God." (2 Cor. III, 5). Too much stress cannot be laid upon these truths. It is necessary for man to possess the grace of God and to persevere in it if he wishes to please God. All else is vain. Because the love of God cannot be in a soul unless it possesses sanctifying grace, what St. Paul says of the love of God may also be said of grace: "If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." (1 Cor. XIII, 3).

Resolve to please God by co-operating with His grace.

Conclusion: "Oh, how exceedingly necessary is Thy grace for me, O Lord, to be that which is good, to go forward with it, and to accomplish it!"

NOVEMBER 20

THE EFFECTS OF GRACE

Grace makes the poor in spirit rich in virtues, and him that is rich in virtues it makes humble of heart. Those who are tempted and in dire tribulations it makes strong, for when God is with us, who can be against us? To the wavering and unstable it gives counsel and help. Those assailed by enemies are made mighty to overcome them. Grace affords a wisdom spiritual in its nature, which makes the soul wiser than the wise of this world. It instils into the heart a knowledge as well as a love for the truth. It disciplines the unruly affections and passions of the heart. It turns sorrow into joy, expels fear, and inspires devotion.

What is man without grace? A refined and cultured creature, perhaps, but utterly unprofitable, for without grace it is impossible to please God, and a man who does not please God, misses his object in life, and cannot gain the happiness of the life to come, for which he was created. He lacks also much of the joy and happiness possible in this life, for even in this life genuine peace and contentment are the product of the love and service of God.

What efforts ought not a man to make, therefore, to persevere in God's grace, in order to gain the effects of grace which conduce to his earthly as well as to his eternal welfare? How fervently ought he not to pray for grace and perseverance? Although God has decreed for each individual a certain measure of grace which cannot be exceeded, nevertheless this measure is so great as to seem infinite. No one, therefore, can be so far advanced in grace as to be able to cease his efforts to obtain more with the thought that he now has

sufficient. As the light of a candle may not be added to in such a degree as to equal the light of the sun, even though the whole world should seem one blaze of light, so our small share of grace will never equal the sum possible by the decree of the good God.

Resolve to seek the love and grace of God always.

Conclusion: "Let Thy grace, O Lord, both go before and follow me, and make me ever intent upon good works."

NOVEMBER 21

THE AUTHOR OF GRACE

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the author of grace, He is the supernatural life of the soul. He tells us this Himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John XIV, 6). He imparts to the soul this life of grace which enables her to live in a sphere higher than the natural, to do what is pleasing to God, to merit a compensation for everything done for His honor and glory and, finally to develop into the life of glory in Heaven.

As the initial gift of grace was a free act on the part of Almighty God, so it needs to be preserved by the receiver, for if lost, like the natural life, it will ordinarily never again revive. However, as God is omnipotent and can restore the dead to life, so also is he able to restore the life of grace. But it must be remembered that He does so as a free agent and nothing can force Him nor justly demand that He do so. The restoration of grace to a soul is an even greater work than the restoration of life to the dead.

These thoughts teach us how important it is that we remain in the state of grace and never lose it. To this end our dear Lord has said that He is the way. The example of His earthly

life is the way which we must follow. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." (Matt. XIX, 17). In all the contingencies of life we must look to His example. In every doubt as to what our conduct should be, we must ask ourselves, what would our dear Lord do under similar circumstances? "If thou abide in Christ's way, thou shalt know the Truth, and the Truth shall deliver thee, and thou shalt attain to life everlasting." Christ is the Truth, for He is God. He has revealed the truth, and by following we can preserve the life of grace. Truly, then, Christ is the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by Him. (John XV, 6).

Resolution: "If thou wilt possess a blessed life, despise this present life."

Conclusion: "O Jesus, how truly thou sayest: 'I am the straightest Way, the sovereign Truth, the true Life, the blessed Life, an uncreated Life.' "

NOVEMBER 22

THE PRESERVATION OF GRACE

To remain in the grace of God is to keep the love of God in our souls. Now, Christ says: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and I will love him, and I will manifest Myself to him." (John XIV, 21). To break the commandments is to break with the love of God. Grievous sin and grace cannot dwell together in the same soul. What is more evident, then, than that, to preserve the state of grace, we must keep the commandments?

Because of the fall of Adam and Eve it is possible for us to keep the commandments only if we are masters of our

own souls. This mastery is acquired by self-denial. The way to salvation is the way of the cross. We must "take up our cross daily and follow Christ." The works and sufferings, the trials and tribulations, the anxieties and worries of life are the cross to which man is fastened. Each has its share of them, and these are the cross which we must carry patiently and perseveringly, if we would be loyal and faithful to our Divine Master, who went before with His good example. Surely "the servant is not greater than his Lord, neither is the disciple above his Master." (Matt. X, 24). Only by conquering ourselves in the daily occurrences of life can we gain a self-control which, with the aid of God's grace, will enable us to keep the commandments. "Take courage, my brethren, let us go forward together; Jesus will be with us. For the sake of Jesus we took up His cross; for the sake of Jesus let us persevere in it. . . . Let us follow Him like men of courage; let no one shrink through fear; let us be ready to die valiantly in battle and not allow our glory to be tarnished by flying from the standard of the cross."

Resolution: "We have begun; it is not lawful to go back; nor may we leave off."

Conclusion: "O Lord, let Thy servant meditate on Thy life, for there is salvation and true holiness."

NOVEMBER 23

THE ASSISTANCE OF GOD'S GRACE

All honest men will admit the difficulty of overcoming oneself. We know how hard it is to preserve patience and humility in adversity. We are disturbed at little things, when

much greater ones ought not to be able to move us. We feel able to advise others, whereas under similar conditions we are unable to put into practise that which we ourselves advise others to do. We undertake to encourage others, while we ourselves are listless and unable to go on.

Yet, despite this untoward experience, we can and will succeed if we have the assistance of grace. To be brought face to face with our frailty is to our benefit, for we then realize how much we are dependent upon the grace of God, and will petition the more for that help. We must not be cast down at the sight of our frailty, but bear it patiently, and if it humiliates us, so much the better, for God reveals Himself to the little ones, but not to the proud.

Should this utter helplessness bring indignation to our hearts, then must we say not a word nor show by sign or action the commotion in our souls. God in His own good time will turn our weakness into strength, our embarrassment and confusion into comfort and joy. "I am still living, saith the Lord, ready to help thee, and comfort thee more than before, If thou put thy trust in Me, and devoutly call upon Me." With calm heart we ought to proceed, knowing our weakness and confidently trusting in God. "All is not lost if thou feel thyself often afflicted and grievously tempted." We cannot expect to be constantly in the same state of soul. At times we will find ourselves inclined to laxity, at others to greater severity. When the soul seems to lean toward a state of laxity, then especially must grace be sought and loyally cooperated with, and all will be well.

Resolution: "Consider the great frailty which thou often experiencest in small difficulties; yet it is intended for thy good, as often as these or such like things befall thee."

Conclusion: "O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee."

NOVEMBER 24

THE MEASURE OF GRACE

The amount of grace given to each individual depends entirely upon the will of God. To some He gives abundantly, to others sparingly. But to all He gives sufficient and allots this sufficiency with generosity. We dare not question God. "why this man is left thus and this other is raised to so great a grace?" We may not even attempt to understand these secrets of God. In the case of our Blessed Mother, the reason for her plentitude of grace is at once evident. Her high and exalted dignity of Mother of Jesus made it fitting that her soul should be filled with grace, for a tabernacle should be worthy its occupant. But as to others we are at sea; why one should receive so much grace and another seemingly so little, cannot be fathomed by the human intellect. "These things are above the reach of man: neither can any reason or discourse be able to penetrate into the judgments of God." Therefore it is wisely said: "God's judgments are to be feared and not to be searched into; for they are incomprehensible to human understanding."

Our endeavor must be to dispose ourselves for God's grace, being ready to benefit by it when it is proffered, being unimpeded by earthly encumbrances when He invites us to follow. Just as the man who is alert and energetic will be successful in life, so, too, the soul that is alert and energetic in prosecuting spiritual works will obtain God's grace abundantly and will not let the graces offered slip by without gaining their full fruit. Hence we must not question why, but dis-

pose ourselves for the graces to be given and utilize them to the utmost.

Resolution: "Dispute not of high matters, nor of the hidden judgments of God."

Conclusion: "Thou art just, O Lord, and Thy judgment is right." (Ps. CXVIII, 137).

NOVEMBER 25

THE SAINTS

The saints of God are the product of grace. In His inscrutable wisdom God allotted to some an immense amount of grace, to others a lesser amount. The merit of the saints consists in their faithful co-operation with the graces given them. Star differs from star in the serene and beautiful heavens. Yet all are beautiful and help to make up that grand galaxy which so impresses the mind of man, and if his heart is right, it calls forth praise and wonderment at the goodness and greatness of the Creator, who is able to produce such beauty for the delectation of His children. As star differs from star so do the saints.

The examples of some of the saints are so marvelous as to evoke the admiration of all who study them; others are so simple that they cannot help but stimulate our desire to imitate them. But as all are the handiwork of the same all-wise Artisan, they must all be loved and praised for God's sake. "He, therefore, who despises one of the least of His saints, honors not the greatest, for God has made both little and great and he that derogates from any one of them, derogates from God and from all the rest of them in the kingdom of Heaven." All the saints exercised virtue in a heroic degree. Their wills were conformed to that of God; they loved God

to the full capacity of their hearts. All are therefore to be honored, none despised. It is true the lives and virtues of some may not be imitated as being too lofty for such as we, who have not their measure of grace. On the other hand there are those who are exemplars of simple virtues, and these ought to be our models, for, following their example we may best learn how to approach the example of our blessed Lord and Master Himself.

Resolution: "God is to be praised in all His saints, He is to be blessed and honored in every one of them, whom He has thus gloriously magnified and eternally chosen, without any merits of their own."

Conclusion: "O almighty, eternal God, who hast granted us to venerate the merits of all Thy saints in one solemnity, vouchsafe to us, we beseech Thee, . . . that abundance of Thy mercy of which we feel the need." (*Missal,* Prayer for All Saints Day).

NOVEMBER 26

LESSONS FROM THE SAINTS

"It is much more acceptable to God for a man to think of the greatness of his own sins, and how little he is advanced in virtue, and how far he is from the perfection of the saints, than to dispute which of them is greater or less." We find that every saint was grounded in the virtue of humility, which those seem to lack who enter upon such disputes, which smack rather of pride than of holy simplicity. "All the saints by how much they are the higher in glory, by so much are they the more humble and nearer to God and more dearly beloved by Him."

If we lack humility, there cannot be much virtue in our

soul. The absurdity of engaging in a discussion concerning the places of the saints in Heaven is at once apparent, for "many examine who is greatest in the kingdom of God, who know not whether they shall be worthy to be numbered among the least." Hence in this matter as in many others, it is only the wiser part to leave to the learned the discussion of subjects which are far beyond our grasp, and rather to assume the rôle of a docile child, who sits quietly by and drinks in the knowledge of others, but has none of his own to impart. "Unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. XVIII, 3–4). We must learn this virtue of the saints and be so humble as not even to desire to search into these exalted matters, nor into the secret judgments of God. The desire for knowledge has developed in our times almost to a mania. When it sets itself against faith and refuses to believe except what is demonstrable, it is rank pride that bars men from the Kingdom of Heaven.

Resolution: "It is better to invoke the saints with devout prayers and tears, and to implore their glorious suffrages with an humble mind, than by a vain inquiry to search into their secrets."

Conclusion: "Rejoice, you that are humble, and be glad, you that are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven; yet so if you walk in truth."

NOVEMBER 27

SIGHING FOR GOD

After a man has been grounded in true devotion, there is one thought that is uppermost in his heart. He may not be

conscious of its presence at all times, yet it is there as an incentive to good actions, as a consolation in his troubles, and as the goal of his very existence. I mean the longing and desire to be with God. The longer a man lives, the more he experiences the inanity of this temporal life and becomes convinced that the only thing worth while is God.

Union with God alone can give the soul a true and lasting satisfaction. "Where was I ever well without Thee, or when could things go ill with me when Thou wast present?" Nothing can supplant this demand of the soul. Temporal goods, honors or pleasures cannot supply the peace and joy of this union with God. "I had rather be poor for Thee than rich without Thee." Heaven itself would not be desirable without the presence of God. "I choose rather to sojourn upon earth with Thee, than to possess Heaven without Thee. Where Thou art, there is Heaven; and where Thou art not there is death and Hell." With Him this earth is tolerable and affords a certain joy, which is a foretaste of Heaven; without Him not all the joys of Heaven could give a soul genuine joy and happiness.

In the soul, then, of the devout man, there is this continual longing to be with God, which is partly sated by the union which the soul enjoys by being in the state of grace. The desire to see Him face to face and of never being able to lose Him is what keeps the soul sighing, as it were, for that happy moment when she will be loosed from the body and able to fly to the eternal embrace of her Saviour, where her happiness will be complete. The longer and the more perfectly he gives itself to a life of virtue, the stronger and the more delightful this longing becomes in the heart of man. "After Thee I have a longing desire, and therefore must needs sigh after Thee, and cry and pray."

Resolution: "Jesus, Jesus, come to me."

Conclusion: "O God, after Thee I have a longing desire.

Thou art my hope, my confidence, my comforter, and most faithful above all."

NOVEMBER 28

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

All men seek their own interest. Very few, indeed, are the examples of genuinely disinterested love. The saints are offered as models, and yet they have repeatedly protested that they found much of self-love in themselves, and it was a continuous task for them to free themselves from love of self. Even the love of husband and wife, as well as the love of parents for their children has, as a rule, a tinge of selfishness in it.

One love alone cannot be questioned; not the shadow of a suspicion can cross it; it is the love of God for each individual soul. Truly must I say: "Thou aimest only at my salvation and profit, and turnest all things to good." We may give ourselves over to this love with the greatest confidence. Anything allowed to befall us by God must be for our good. Sometimes it may seem as if God left us to our own resources alone, as if He were about to permit our ruin. By the soul that has confidence, however, all such suppositions must be recognized as wide of the mark, for the devout man knows that God will never forsake him and whatever temptations He sends must be for his good, though at present he may not see what they are good for. The same is true of adversity. Misfortune after misfortune may come upon a man, so that he knows not where to turn. It may seem that God has forgotten him entirely. The man with confidence in God knows, however, that every cloud has its silver lining, and that what is hid from him now will become manifest in

God's own good time. Therefore, I must learn to love and praise God in adversity as well as in prosperity, in temptation as well as in peaceful moments, for He is ever the same God, who has always my welfare at heart.

Resolution: "Have confidence in the Lord with all thy heart." (Prov. III, 5).

Conclusion: "O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee."

NOVEMBER 29

HOPE IN GOD

Trust in God not only honors Him, but is at the same time one of the greatest boons for ourselves. There are experiences and works in our spiritual life which we must keep absolutely to ourselves, if we wish to avoid vain glory. There are other phases so intimate and personal that to disclose them would rob them of their charm and often times also of their reward. When a man, through a motive of virtue, thus hides himself from the eyes of men, he often passes as an inferior individual who is not possessed of initiative, inefficient, listless and aimless. The man thus appraised, even though he knows that the appraisal is false, must have an abiding hope in God, satisfied that it is only God's appraisal that counts and that God sees his deeds and struggles, perfectly understands his motives and will infallibly reward even the least thing done for His honor. The man animated by this confidence may lead a care-free life, for He may leave all to the good God in Whom he hopes. Should he, through his seeming inferiority and inefficiency, be passed over and not be promoted to posts he may think he is entitled to occupy; should neither reward nor recognition come to him for loyal service to his superior, or for faithful performance of all his duties,

his consolation may always be that there is One who knows, appreciates and rewards; and this is sufficient. In God he has all that is needed. "For neither will a multitude of friends be of any service to him; nor can strong auxiliaries bring him help, nor wise counsellors give him a profitable answer, nor the books of the learned comfort him, nor any wealth deliver him, nor any secret and pleasant place secure him, if God Himself does not assist, help, strengthen, comfort, instruct, and defend him."

Resolution: "It is good to confide in the Lord, rather than to have confidence in man." (Ps. CXVII, 8).

Conclusion: "In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded." (Ps. XXX, 2).

NOVEMBER 30

ABANDONMENT

How peaceful and happy the man who entirely surrenders himself to Divine Providence! Casting himself upon the goodness and mercy of God, he does not depend upon men for peace and consolation of soul. God is the "fountain of all good, the height of life, and the depth of wisdom: and to trust Him above all things is the greatest comfort of His servants." When all is viewed as the Providence of God, what matters it whether we are great or small in the eyes of men, whether we hold high positions or are the servant of servants, whether we are rich or poor, whether we enjoy the esteem of men or their disfavor, whether we pass as learned or are classed with the ignorant, whether we are looked upon as holy or are put down as men of little piety? Only one thing matters,—what we are in the eyes of God. No matter

how His Providence would have us appear before men, if we are genuinely given to the fulfillment of His holy will in all things, and this because we love Him, naught else is of any value. If we are destined by Him to shine before men, then must we accept this mission from His hand without pride and use the opportunity to praise and honor God and to have others do likewise through this means which He has given us. Should we, on the other hand, be destined by His Providence to lead a hidden life, then too, are we satisfied, for as long as it is the will of God for us, that is sufficient to make us happy, give us peace, and merit for us an exceedingly great reward. Whatever He wills, we will. Thus to adandon ourselves to the will of God brings the securest and most satisfying peace in this life and the most abundant reward in the next.

Resolution: "To Thee I lift up my eyes; in Thee O Lord, the Father of mercies, I put my trust."

Conclusion: "Protect and defend the soul of Thy poor servant amidst so many dangers of this corrupt life, and direct him in the company of Thy grace, through the way of peace, to the country of everlasting light."

DECEMBER 1

MAN AND THE BLESSED EUCHARIST

Were that possible, a man might desire to begin the union with God intended for Heaven already here upon earth. In a sense it *is* possible through the institution by our dear Lord and Saviour of the Blessed Sacrament. We have in Holy Communion the union of Jesus Christ with our souls, which

is the nearest approach possible in this life to union with God in Heaven. Holy Communion helps us to persevere in grace, which again is akin to the union of God and the soul in Heaven. Through the Blessed Eucharist we are enabled also to engage in the occupation of the blessed in heaven by adoring God really present in the Blessed Sacrament as He is in Heaven, with this difference only, that in Heaven we enjoy the beatific vision, whereas on earth we see Him veiled under the sacramental forms of bread and wine.

The Blessed Eucharist should then be the central point of a devout man's religion. What has he more in Heaven than he has in the Holy Eucharist here upon earth? Could he realize this fact, his whole life would be centered about our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The Church acts according to this fact and therefore her sacred liturgy is intended to honor Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Should a liturgical function not have this direct aim in view, it is made subservient to the Blessed Sacrament, if there be any connection or correlation possible between them. The very object of the priesthood is Eucharistic. Priests are ordained to offer sacrifice which in the new Dispensation is offering to the Heavenly Father the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. They are ordained to say Mass, in which the food for our souls is prepared. The matter of the greatest significance for the Christian soul is that the Emanuel, "which is interpreted, God with us," is truly on earth and in the Holy Eucharist.

Resolution: Seek to realize that God is with us.

Conclusion: "O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament Divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine."

DECEMBER 2

COMMUNION WITH CHRIST

The institution of the Holy Eucharist has made possible a most sympathetic intercourse between the soul and God already in this life. Although Christ in the holy Eucharist is as really present as any friend would be with whom we were communicating, yet there is not that sense of His presence in us because we do not see Him with our bodily eyes and must rely rather on the dictates of faith than upon the evidence furnished by the senses. Communication with an earthly friend is carried on by means of the faculties of the body, but with Christ it is purely spiritual. We speak to Him often by word of mouth, but we wait in vain for an audible answer. He does answer, however, by the holy thoughts and pious inspirations which He excites in our hearts. A communcation so lofty and spiritual is difficult for us, since in this life we are dependent upon the senses. That it is difficult, however, is no proof that communion is not true and real. The stronger our faith, the longer we strive to realize vividly the presence of our dear Saviour in the Holy Eucharist, the easier will be the intercourse between our soul and the Eucharistic Christ. Those who come often into His presence in the spirit of faith, will the sooner learn the joy and consolation of this association with their hidden God. Others who are not able to come often into His sacramental presence, can gain much the same effects by often turning their thoughts to Jesus in the tabernacle nearest to where they are.

Communication by radio is an established fact to-day. Spiritual radio-casting has been in existence for thousands of years. Christ in the Eucharist knows when our thoughts

are centered on Him and He sends communications to our hearts with the same rapidity as does the radio station. The Psalmist exclaims: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity"; (Ps. CXXXII, 1), how much more must it be to dwell intimately with Christ.

Resolve to think daily of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Conclusion: "Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us."

DECEMBER 3

SACRAMENTAL UNION WITH CHRIST

Our blessed Lord and Saviour was not satisfied to institute the Holy Eucharist as a sacrifice alone, nor only as a means to remain with us in the tabernacle, but He wished in this Sacrament to give Himself to us in a union so close and intimate that we might live in Him and He in us. This He accomplishes by giving us His Body and Blood as food for our souls under the appearances of bread and wine in Holy Communion. "The bread which I shall give, is My flesh for the life of the world." (John VI, 52).

Why did He wish to unite Himself to us so closely? He wished to be our powerful helper in the trials of life and our consoler in the sorrows which must come in this vale of tears. Hence His invitation: "Come to Me, all you that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." (Matt. XI, 28). Can there be any greater love toward us than this love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament? One would think that these words of Jesus would send us running into the arms of the good Master. "These words, of so great tenderness, full of sweetness and love, encourage me; but my sins terrify me,

and my unclean conscience keeps me back from approaching to such great mysteries. The sweetness of Thy words invites me, but the multitude of my offences weighs me down." It is sin that holds us back. When we have broken with sin, and learned that our dear Lord does not demand our reverence as much as He desires our love, we will eagerly receive Holy Communion as frequently as we can, to be united with the God of our hearts. We will not rest satisfied until we are allowed to approach the holy table daily, where that is possible. How can it be otherwise for those who realize what Holy Communion is and what it means for the soul?

Resolution: I labor and am burdened, hence I will come to my Saviour in Holy Communion.

Conclusion: "O good Jesus listen to me.
In Thy wounds I fain would hide,
Ne'er to be parted from Thy side."

DECEMBER 4

THE CONDESCENSION OF JESUS

Consider the infinite condescension of Jesus in inviting man to unite himself with the God-man in the Blessed Sacrament. The Heavens are not worthy to contain Him, yet He lowers Himself to enter the heart of man. He chose the virginal bosom of His immaculate Mother to be His resting-place here upon earth, and yet He is satisfied now with a sin-scarred soul which has perhaps only recently been made clean for His reception. The archangels stand with a reverential awe; the saints and the just tremble; and Thou sayest: "Come you all to Me!" "Unless Thou, O Lord, didst say it, who could believe it to be true? And unless Thou didst command it, who would dare to approach?"

Looking to ourselves, what have we of good on which to presume to approach this august Sacrament? The Blessed Mother of God was pronounced full of grace before the Incarnation of her divine Son. We know that this fact did not make her worthy of the signal honor bestowed upon her, but it at least was an attraction which drew the eye of the eternal Father upon her. We have not even this grace in any amount to attract the predilection of the divine Master in the Blessed Sacrament. All we have is a gift of His bounteous generosity, rather than a merit of our own. Not only have we little to attract Him; we would actually repulse Him, were it not for His great love and condescension. Richly have we deserved His indignation by our many and repeated sins. Were God's ways man's ways, never would He allow us to approach Him, after we had committed only one venial sin, so great is His detestation of sin, even the smallest. Despite His hatred of sin, in His great mercy and astounding condescension, He allows us to introduce Him into our house, to make it His dwelling. "Come you all to me!" He invites us in the face of our unworthiness. There is only one thing to do,—obey.

Resolution: Admire and take advantage of the condescension of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Conclusion: "O Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter into my soul, say but the word, and my soul shall be healed."

DECEMBER 5

THE CONSIDERATION OF JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

The Eucharistic Jesus knows our limitations and our defects brought on as a result of original sin. He knows also the deleterious effects of our own personal sins. Therefore in His

goodness He makes allowance for our neglect of Him in the Blessed Sacrament and readily overlooks the faults we commit in the very reception of Him. A whole life of preparation would not be sufficient to make us worthy to receive Him; then, what must the short half-hour or even less be that is usually spent in preparation? Were Jesus to insist on the reverence which is His due in the Blessed Sacrament, no one would be allowed to receive Holy Communion. Only His consideration for our misery and imperfection allows us to approach Him, and lest we should be over awed by reverence and deterred from giving Him a welcome in our hearts, He has commanded us to receive Him in Holy Communion: "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you." (John VI, 54).

However, we must not presume upon His goodness, but must strive to prepare our souls for His coming as well as we are able. Moses made the Ark of the Covenant of the most precious wood and covered it with gold to make it a fit resting-place for the tables of the law. Surely we ought to be as much concerned to cleanse our hearts from sin and ornament them with virtue to receive, not the tables of the law, but the Maker of the law Himself. Solomon spent seven years in building the Temple and a week in offering dedicatory sacrifices to make it a worthy habitation of God; how carefully then ought we to prepare for the reception of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament! This much the Divine Master has every right to expect of us, that we do what lies in our power to show at least that we wish to do all that is humanly possible to make ourselves worthy.

Resolution: Live prepared to receive the Lord daily.

Conclusion: "Visit and cleanse our consciences, we beseech Thee, O Lord that when Thy Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, shall come, He may find within us a dwelling place made ready for him." (*Missal,* Preparation for Holy Mass).

DECEMBER 6

JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AND SHRINES

Many visit the shrines of the saints, and are astonished to hear of their wonderful works, but Jesus, who is present in person in every church, they often neglect. In visiting the shrines of the saints men are often moved by curiosity, but reap little fruit for their souls. Unless one's devotion be accompanied by compunction of heart for the sins of one's life these visits may not be of much value. In the veneration of the saints there is more likelihood of this contrition for sins not being present than in the cult of the Blessed Sacrament, for the fruit of eternal salvation is plentifully reaped as often as Holy Communion is worthily and devoutly received. "And to this we are not drawn by any levity, curiosity, or sensuality, but by a firm faith, a devout hope, and sincere charity."

This Sacrament then is conducive to perfection and virtue, "for God's true faithful, who dispose their whole life in amendment by this worthy Sacrament, frequently receive a great grace of devotion and love of virtue." The elation oftentimes accompanying an enthusiasm for a saint or superinduced by the beauty of a shrine and the attendant devotion of the visitors, is not nearly as satisfying and lasting as the quiet joy and peace which usually accompanies the genuine love of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist. The veneration of the saints and pilgrimages to their shrines have the high approval of the Church and must therefore be good in themselves; it is the abuse that must be condemned, and the neglect of the Blessed Sacrament, which is so often the consequence, must be deprecated. Above all and in the first place

must come the devotion to Jesus in the Sacrament of His love. "Behold I have here present on the altar, my God, the Saint of saints the Creator of men, and Lord of angels."

Resolution: To be more and more inflamed with love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Conclusion: "Oh, the wonderful and the hidden grace of this Sacrament, which only the faithful of Christ know, but unbelievers and such as are slaves to sin cannot experience."

DECEMBER 7

PATIENCE OF JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

We are forced to admire the patience of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, when we consider the boon He wished to confer upon mankind and the lukewarmness with which it is received. "In this Sacrament is conferred spiritual grace; lost virtue is repaired in the soul; and beauty, disfigured by sin, returns again. And so great sometimes is this grace that, from the abundance of the devotion that is bestowed, not only the mind, but the frail body also feels a great increase of strength."

All these benefits out of an excess of love God wished to bestow upon man. "Yet it is to be lamented and pitied, that man should be so lukewarm and negligent, as not to be drawn with greater affection to the receiving of Christ, in whom consists all the hope and merit of those that shall be saved." Many receive Him infrequently in Holy Communion. Others prepare for His coming, but thank Him negligently. "If this most Holy Sacrament were celebrated only in one place, and consecrated only by one priest in the world, how great a desire would men have to go to that place, and to such a priest, that they might see the divine mysteries celebrated.

But now there are many priests, and Christ is offered up in many places, so that the grace and love of God for man may appear so much the greater, by so much more this sacred communion is spread throughout the world." But His greater love is the very pretext for the lesser return of love by man. Being more widespread, it is less appreciated, as is so often the case with the things made common by their abundance. Blessed the man who is not blinded by this abundance and will still retain for these graces that appreciation which they deserve, being as they are precious and indispensable despite their plentifulness.

Resolve to retain a high estimate of the value of Holy Communion.

Conclusion: "Thanks be to Thee, O good Jesus, our eternal Shepherd, who hast vouchsafed to feed us poor exiles with Thy precious body and blood, and to invite us to receive these mysteries with the words of Thy own mouth saying: 'Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you.' " (Matt. XI, 28).

DECEMBER 8

HOLY COMMUNION AND HUMILITY

Besides faith, the virtue that must be most exercised in the reception of Holy Communion is humility. Man is utterly unworthy and undeserving that his God should come to him. It is easily understood that man as a creature should go to his Creator, as a servant to his Master, as one needy to his King, and as one in desolation to his comforter; but that God should come to man, is beyond our conception. Man has everything to gain by going to God, but God gains absolutely nothing by coming to man. That God should come to us despite our unworthiness and our inability to offer Him any

advantage whatsoever, should make us humble indeed. To receive so great a good and to be unable to offer anything in return, should give us a proper opinion of ourselves and an admiration of the infinite goodness and mercy of God.

There is just one danger in this estimate which we are forced to form of ourselves, and that is the temptation to stay away from Holy Communion because of our unworthiness. Such action would be quite mistaken. God is pleased with our humility and is honored by our praise, thanks, and reverence which naturally flow from the humble soul to Jesus in Holy Communion. Humility is the mother virtue which brings many other virtues into existence for the honor and glory of God in the reception of Holy Communion. Not to receive this holy Sacrament because of a sense of unworthiness, would nip these virtues in the bud. "Since, therefore, this is what pleases God, and He has commanded that it should be so, His merciful condescension should please me also, . . . and when I am approaching my Lord, whom I can never reverence as I ought, and yet would gladly receive with devotion, I can think of nothing better or more wholesome to my soul, than to humble myself entirely in His presence and extol His goodness above all."

Resolution: Praise God and extol Him, despise yourself in the depths of your unworthiness.

Conclusion: "O most sweet and most bountiful Jesus, what great reverence and thanks are due to Thee for giving us Thy sacred Body, whose dignity no man can sufficiently express!"

DECEMBER 9

THE MYSTERIES OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

It is indeed, beyond man's comprehension, why the Creator of Heaven and earth should stoop to the humiliation of

the Blessed Sacrament. In it the Ruler of all things appears under the species of bread and wine and makes Himself the food of His creatures. Under this form He not only appears less than God but even less than man, for bread and wine, being inanimate objects, are less in the range of creation than man, who is an animate and reasonable being. Why Jesus should choose to stay among men, and why He elected to stay amongst them veiled under the appearance of bread and wine, must mystify any one not possessed of divine revelation and the teaching of the Church, which are the basis of our faith. "A wonderful thing it is, and worthy of faith, and exceeding all human understanding, that Thou, O Lord, my God, true God and true man, art contained whole and entire under a small form of bread and wine, and art eaten by the receiver without being consumed."

Besides faith, love of God clarifies these facts which in themselves are so incomprehensible. The more a man loves God, the better will he be able to understand the love God bears him. And after all, the Blessed Eucharist is a work of love. Jesus loves men so much as to desire to be with them always, here in the vale of their earthly pilgrimage. He did not exempt Himself from the natural law of death, in order to redeem every human being that should inhabit this world. Hence He made the great sacrifice of His life for the sins of men, yet in His divine wisdom, He found a way of remaining with men even after death by means of their Holy Sacrament. It was only Christ's exceeding love for men that could invent such a means as the Blessed Eucharist to attain such a purpose. "Behold whence love proceeds, what a bounty shines forth! How great thanks and praises are due to God for these things!"

Resolution: "Rejoice, O my soul, and give thanks to Thy God for so noble a gift and so singular a comfort left thee in this vale of tears."

Conclusion: "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift." (2 Cor. IX, 15).

DECEMBER 10

THE JOY OF HOLY COMMUNION

When the soul is united with its Blessed Saviour in Holy Communion, a sense of well-being takes possession of the heart. The soul has in Holy Communion all that it can or ought to desire. In the possession of Jesus it has salvation, for He is the source and reason of salvation. There is strong hope that Jesus will not put from Him one with whom He has associated so intimately. Strength of soul follows consequent to union with the dear Master. "If God be for us, who is against us?" (Rom. VIII, 31). The soul having possession of these goods, the highest and most important of mortal life, feels a joy and delight which are a veritable foretaste of Heaven.

Gladly and often, therefore, ought we to receive Holy Communion, and our approach to this joy-giving Sacrament ought to be the most devout and reverent. Zaccheus was filled with delight and joy when the Saviour singled him out to act as His host for dinner. How gladly he brought Him into his house! "I, too, will gladly bring Thee into my house, that, like Zaccheus, I may receive Thy blessing and be numbered among the children of Abraham." Here I may rest peacefully. United with Jesus in the Sacrament of His love, I have everything that I shall have in Heaven, for the possession of God is Heaven. Then when the moments of Holy Communion are past, my soul is refreshed and encouraged to go on. Conscious of the fact that I so often fall into sin, and so quickly grow slack and faint, I discover that addi-

tional strength and incentive is brought to me by this Sacrament, and realize more than ever that "it is necessary for me, by frequent prayers and confession, and by the Holy Communion of Thy Body, to repair my strength, to cleanse and inflame my soul, lest perhaps, by abstaining for a longer time, I fall away from my holy purpose."

Resolve to come often to Jesus, in His holy banquet.

Conclusion: "Make, therefore, the soul of Thy servant joyful this day, because, O Lord Jesus, I have lifted up my soul to Thee."

DECEMBER 11

THE PROMPTINGS OF GRACE

The boiler-maker, forced to hear the constant clanging of metal, usually grows so accustomed to this din as not to be incommoded by it, but in course of time he becomes hard of hearing, nay some times deaf. To hear and feel the prompting of grace unheedingly may result in spiritual deafness.

Time and again, our Divine Friend in the tabernacle invites us to take Him into our hearts, sometimes by direct inspirations, at other times through a sermon or the counsel of a zealous confessor, or again through good reading or the example of others. But how often do such invitations go unheeded! It is as though we did not hear them, as if we were not meant. "Oh, ye of little faith," are words that might be addressed to us. No man would refuse the Lord, were He to address Himself personally to him. Yet we who have faith know that the desire of our Lord is to be with the children of men. How can we refuse to grant Him His desire? We might address our Blessed Saviour with the words: "It is then Thy will that I should receive Thee, and through love

unite myself to Thee. Therefore I implore Thy mercy and beg of Thee to give me a special grace, that I may wholly melt away in Thee and overflow with Thy love, and seek no comfort in anything else." How happy the man who is so docile and obedient to the promptings of grace that he leads an almost uninterrupted life of union with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, by frequent Communion, by visits to the hidden Saviour in the Tabernacle, by an interior life of thoughts and desires centering about the Sacrament of the altar!

Resolution: "O Lord, in the simplicity of my heart, with a good and firm faith, and in obedience to Thy command, I come to Thee with hope and reverence."

Conclusion: "O Lord, my God, aid Thy servant in the blessing of Thy sweetness, that I may worthily and devoutly approach Thy magnificent Sacrament."

DECEMBER 12

HOLY COMMUNION AND SPIRITUAL DRYNESS

One of the reasons why some do not receive Holy Communion frequently is a certain spiritual dryness which overspreads the soul and causes a distaste for almost everything religious. The policy of staying away from Holy Communion until spiritual fervor returns, is entirely mistaken, for in Holy Communion will be found the very remedy for this disorder. Thomas à Kempis makes the soul say to the Eucharistic King: "Thou impartest unto them such consolation, to support them in their many troubles; and Thou liftest them up from their own dejection, to the hope of Thy protection; and dost recreate and enlighten them interiorly with a certain new grace; in such sort, that they who before

Communion were anxious, and felt no affection in themselves, after having been fed with this heavenly food and drink, find themselves changed for the better."

What is necessary is, that the communicant receive Him with all the worthiness he is capable of, and strive to approach Holy Communion with as much love and fervor as he can possibly elicit. If he thus approaches this holy Sacrament, he may be assured that if he is not wholly comforted and delivered from his misery, he will at least obtain some consolation and relief, which in time will be augmented, until he will again enjoy the consolations and comforts which our dear Lord is wont to bestow upon those who love Him. "Wherefore, if I cannot draw out of the fulness of the fountain, nor drink my fill, I will at least set my mouth to the orifice of this heavenly pipe, that so I may draw from thence some small drop to refresh my thirst, to the end that I may not be wholly dried up." Our Lord in His loving goodness will not refuse His consolation to those of good will. "For who is he that, approaching humbly to the fountain of sweetness, does not carry away with him some little sweetness?"

Resolution: "I will endeavor to apply myself to devotion, and to prepare by heart for the acquiring of some little flame of divine love, by the humble reception of this life-giving Sacrament."

Conclusion: "Grant, O Lord, that my devotion may increase with the frequenting of this Thy Mystery."

DECEMBER 13

THE PRIESTHOOD

In the present order of things there would be no Blessed Sacrament without the priesthood, and without the Blessed

Sacrament there would be no need of a priesthood. The first and most important duty of the priest is to sacrifice in a mystical manner the "Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world." Sacrifice is the highest act of religion that can be offered to almighty God. The oblation of the New Testament may be made only by a duly ordained priest, who offers the Mass in his own name as well as in the name of the people. Priests may truly be termed "other Christs," since they offer the same victim as Christ did when He offered Himself to His Heavenly Father on the cross. No priest is, or can claim to be, worthy of this high dignity. It may rightly be said to him: "If thou hadst the purity of an angel, and the sanctity of St. John the Baptist, thou wouldst not be worthy to receive or handle this Sacrament. For it is not due to any human merits that a man should consecrate and handle the Sacrament of Christ and receive the bread of angels for his food." But despite the unworthiness of the priest, the fact is that, by virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders which he has received, he possesses the power to change bread and wine into a Victim most acceptable to God, and to immolate this Victim as a sacrifice most pleasing to Him. "Great is this mystery, and great the dignity of priests, to whom is given what is not granted to angels." Aided by the light of faith, how great ought to be our respect and love for the priests of God,—a respect and love not prompted by mere sentiment, but based on the consideration of the office and power of the priests in the Church.

Resolve to respect, love, and pray for the priests of God.

Conclusion: "Let us dearly beloved brethren, beseech God, the Father Almighty, to multiply His heavenly gifts on these His servants, whom He has chosen for the office of the priesthood, and enable them to accomplish by His help what they undertake through His favor." (*Prayer* in The Rite of Ordination).

DECEMBER 14

PRIEST AND PEOPLE

As Moses was the intermediary between God and His people, so, too, is the priest. Moses went up the mountain to receive the communications God wished to make to His people, and he carried with him the supplication of the people to their God. When the people were in need of food, Moses obtained for them manna from Heaven. "A priest clad in his sacred vestments is Christ's vice-gerent to pray God for himself and for all people, in a suppliant and humble manner. . . . When a priest celebrates Mass, he honors God, rejoices the angels, edifies the Church, helps the living, obtains rest for the dead, and makes himself a partaker of all that is good." He gives to the people the true Manna that came down from Heaven, the saving Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the spiritual food of the soul. When, as of old, the people sin against their God, he offers up to the merciful Father the self-same sacrifice which Christ offered on the Cross, and he prays that through the merits of this sacrifice mercy and forgiveness be extended to the erring children of men.

What an exalted office is that of the priest, and what a boon and blessing the priesthood is for mankind! His duties chiefly center around the altar, and to the altar must the hearts of men be drawn. As the thoughts of the Israelites were centered upon their Temple, which was the place appointed for sacrifice, so the hearts of Christians must be concentrated on the central point of the Catholic ritual, the Blessed Eucharist, both as a sacrifice and as a Sacrament. It is the priest's privilege as well as duty to lead men closer to

the altar, to have them join with him in the sacrifice, to feed them with the very flesh and blood of the Victim; and not, as of old, like the prophets, to leave them there and to go and treat with the Lord alone.

Resolve to join with the priests in sacrifice and Holy Communion, to honor God and to obtain eternal salvation.

Conclusion: "Humbled in mind and contrite of heart, may we find favor with Thee, O Lord, and may the sacrifice which we offer up this day be well pleasing to Thee, who art our Lord and our God." (*Missal,* Oblation Prayer in the Proper of the Mass).

DECEMBER 15

PREPARATION FOR HOLY COMMUNION

In the old monarchies of Europe, when a king honored a city with a visit, much time and thought were spent in preparing for the unusual event. The city took on a gala attire, the citizens suspended their work, and neither labor nor expense was spared to make the occasion a fitting demonstration of loyalty and love. Suppose the ruler had expressed the intention of visiting the poorest family in that city; how non-plussed and at an utter loss that poor family would have been as to how to receive and entertain the king! In Holy Communion, not an earthly king, but the King of kings comes, not to visit a poor family, but the most unworthy of His creatures. "When I consider Thy greatness, O Lord, and my own vileness, I tremble very much and am confounded in myself. For if I come not to Thee, I fly from life; and if I intrude myself unworthily, I incur Thy displeasure."

In this dilemma there is only one thing to do, and that is, to make ourselves as worthy as it is possible for poor mortals to be, by earnest and serious preparation. We know that free-

dom from mortal sin and a right intention is all that is absolutely required for worthy Communion; but who will stop here, when it is within his power to do more? Who will miss this opportunity of proving his love and loyalty to the Eucharistic King? Time, thought, and preparation ought to be given to this event, even though it occur every day. Even important happenings, when they occur frequently, lose their impressiveness. The communicant must accordingly guard against an attitude of indifference in receiving Holy Communion. Unless he gives time and thought to preparing his soul for each Holy Communion, it will be small honor to Jesus and produce very little benefit for himself, even though it be not unworthy.

Resolve to make a good preparation for every Holy Communion you receive.

Conclusion: "Do Thou, O Lord, teach me the right way; appoint me some short exercise proper for Holy Communion."

DECEMBER 16

REMOTE PREPARATION

The need of preparing for the reception of this august Sacrament is more forcibly impressed upon us when we consider the imperfection and weakness of our spiritual life. The remote preparation for Holy Communion is the perfecting of the spiritual life. The great saints of God were always prepared to receive the Food of Angels. Their continual recollection and constant union with God, even amidst distracting labors, their yearning desire for the Eucharistic banquet, and their frequent thought of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, made them ready, as far as human means can go, for the reception of their Lord and Master in this Sacrament.

We who are less perfect ought first of all diligently to examine our consciences, and to the best of our power cleanse and purify them by true contrition and humble confession, so that there be nothing weighty to give remorse and to hinder the access of grace. We ought to repent of all our sins in general, and in particular to lament and grieve for our daily offences. Having purified our souls, we should seek more and more to habitually avoid all venial sins. Because of human weakness, perhaps only few will succeed in this endeavor; but, as St. Augustine says: "Our Master did not say 'succeed,' but 'strive'!" The effort is the preparation here referred to, and the good will will be kindly accepted for the deed, provided only the effort is serious, sincere, and persevering. Couple this effort with an immediate contrition for every repeated fall, and the soul will be at once purified, and there is hope for success in banishing deliberate venial sins. "If a man does what lies in him, and is truly penitent, as often as he shall come to Me for pardon and grace, 'As I live, saith the Lord, who wills not the death of the sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live, I shall no longer remember his sins' (Ezech. XXXIII, 11), but all shall be forgiven him."

Resolve to strive for perfection as a preparation for Holy Communion.

Conclusion: "Heal my soul, O Lord, for I have sinned against Thee."

DECEMBER 17

OUR UNWORTHINESS

A consideration of the frailty of human nature and the miseries to which we are heir, is well calculated to convince

us of our unworthiness to receive the Most Holy into our hearts. An excellent preparation for the reception of this holy Sacrament is, in the words of *The Following of Christ* "to sigh and grieve from time to time that thou art yet so carnal and worldly; so unmortified in thy passions; so full of the motions of concupiscence; so unguarded in thy outward senses; so entangled with vain imaginings; so much inclined to exterior things; so negligent as to the interior; so ready to laughter and dissoluteness; so hard to tears and compunction; so prone to relaxation and the pleasures of the flesh; so sluggish to austerity and fervor; so curious to hear news and see fine sights; so remiss to embrace things abject and humble; so covetous to possess much; so sparing in giving, so close in retaining; so inconsiderate in speech; so little able to hold thy peace; so disorderly in thy carriage; so over eager in thy actions; so greedy at meals; so deaf to the word of God; so hasty for rest; so slow to labor; so wakeful to hear idle tales; so drowsy to watch in the service of God; so hasty to make an end to thy prayers; so wandering as to attention; so quickly distracted; so seldom quite recollected within thyself; so easily moved to anger; so apt to take offence at others; so prone to judge; so severe in reprehending; so joyful in prosperity; so weak in adversity; so often proposing good things and effecting little."

An acknowledgment of these, our weaknesses, although they are more a result of poor human nature corrupted by original sin than the outcome of deliberate intention on our part, shows our unworthiness despite our best efforts to make ourselves worthy and emphasizes the need to remove all culpable unworthiness as far as possible.

Resolution: "I repent me of my sins; I will strive to amend my ways."

Conclusion: "Incline Thine ear, O Lord, and hear me; for I am needy and poor." (Ps. LXXXXV, 1).

DECEMBER 18

OUR WORTHINESS

Were we to look only to our unworthiness, who of us would dare to receive Holy Communion? Our Blessed Saviour did not intend that only the strictly worthy should receive Him in the Blessed Sacrament. He did not intend this Sacrament as a reward for, but rather as an aid to, virtue. His gracious invitation, as well as the desire of our holy Mother the Church, encourage us to receive Holy Communion frequently, it being understood, that we strive to make ourselves as worthy as is possible for us.

Here the very Guest whom we are to receive comes to our aid. Holy Communion is usually received during Mass. In the Holy Sacrifice we pray with the priest at the offertory: "Receive, O holy Father, almighty and eternal God, this spotless host, which I, thine unworthy servant, offer to Thee, my living and true God, for my countless sins, trespasses, and omissions." This same Jesus whom we are to receive, offers Himself up to the Heavenly Father for the forgiveness of our sins. In view of this fact, when we hear Mass with fervor and devotion, our venial sins and negligences are forgiven, and we may come with a pure soul to the communion rail. Thus Jesus in His goodness is our worthiness as well as our guest in Holy Communion. To receive this influence of Christ upon the soul, it is necessary to make an entire oblation of ourselves to Him without reserve. "As I willingly offered Myself to God the Father for thy sins," we may hear Him say, "with My hands stretched out upon the Cross, and My body naked, so that nothing remained in Me, which was not turned into a sacrifice to appease the divine wrath;—even

so must thou offer thyself to Me willingly in the Mass, for a pure and holy oblation, together with all thy powers and affections, as heartily as thou art able."

Resolution: "Give thyself wholly to God, and thy offering will be acceptable."

Conclusion: "Into a pure heart, O Lord, may we receive the heavenly food, which has passed our lips; bestowed upon us in time, may it be the healing of our souls for eternity." (*Missal,* Prayer after Communion).

DECEMBER 19

THE MASS, THE REMEDY FOR SINFULNESS

Any one with a sense of the dignity of God and a knowledge of his own sinfulness can understand the incongruity of a union of God's holiness with man's sinfulness. Despite this unappropriateness, the good God has shown us a way to this union, not by uniting holiness with sinfulness, but by giving us the means of removing our guilt and then uniting holiness with lesser holiness. The Mass is the remedy for our sinfulness. We may say: "Lord, I offer to Thee all the sins and offences which I have committed in Thy sight, and in that of Thy holy angels, from the day that I was first capable of sinning until this hour, upon Thy altar, that Thou mayest burn and consume them all with the fire of Thy charity, that Thou mayest remove all the stains of my sins, cleanse my conscience from all offences, and restore me to Thy grace, which I have lost by sin, by fully pardoning me and mercifully receiving me to the kiss of peace."

Having placed our sins upon the altar to be consumed, as

it were, by fire, in a genuine spirit of repentance, we may be assured that they will be taken away, provided they be not mortal, for to wipe out these latter the Sacrament of Penance is necessary. The Lord will not despise an humble and contrite heart, and He will not disappoint the sinner who repentantly lays his sins on the altar where Christ offers Himself as the Lamb of God for the sins of the world. The stains and the remains of sin will be washed from the robe of innocence by the precious Blood of Christ, and holiness will again adorn the soul that comes to be sweetly united to God in the Sacrament of His love. Sinful we are, it is true, but in His unbounded mercy, God has made it possible to restore an innocence which makes this union of God with the soul less incongruous and indescribably sweet.

Resolution: "All my sins displease me exceedingly; I will never commit them any more; I am sorry for them and will be sorry for them as long as I live; I am willing to do penance for them, and to make satisfaction for them to the utmost of my power."

Conclusion: O Lord, "deal with me according to Thy goodness, not according to my iniquity."

DECEMBER 20

FURTHER PREPARATION

The more immediate preparation will consist in prayers and pious sentiments which we should endeavor to arouse in our souls. Lest we be downcast because of our unworthiness, it would be well to recall to mind the good which, with the grace of God, we have been able to do. Little as it will be, in gratitude to God for having enabled us to do it, we may

offer it up to His divine Majesty, asking Him to make it better and to sanctify it, so that it will redound to His honor and glory, and make us in some little way pleasing to Him. Led on by the desire to do more good, in the very act of preparation, our charity for God and our neighbor may be diffused by the general purport of our prayers. The beautiful words of *The Following of Christ* might well be repeated frequently as a preparation for Holy Communion: "I offer to Thee all the godly desires of Thy devout servants, the necessities of my parents, friends, brethren, sisters, and all those who are dear to me; and for all such as have been benefactors to me or others for the love of Thee; or who have desired or begged me to offer up prayers and masses for themselves and all that belong to them; whether they still live as yet in the flesh or are departed out of the world; that they all may be sensible of the assistance of Thy grace, of the benefit of Thy comfort, of Thy protection from all dangers, and of deliverance from their pains; and that, being freed from all evils, they may with joy give worthy thanks to Thee."

Our love of God in the concrete is expressed mostly by good works done to our neighbor. Hence our benevolence and prayers for our neighbor are love also for our Saviour. The practice of the one is the exercise of the other. Humanly speaking, the more good we do, the more worthy we become of receiving Holy Communion, and in the practice of the love of our neighbor we can do much good.

Resolution: Do, think, and desire for others as you would for Christ.

Conclusion: O Lord, who hast said: "As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me," accept my good wishes and deeds toward my neighbor as intended for Thee.

DECEMBER 21

PREPARATION CONTINUED

Our love of God is intensified by love of our enemies and of those who have injured us. It is the acme of the love of God to love our enemies for His sake. It is most pleasing to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, therefore, to hear us say: "I offer to Thee my prayers and this Sacrament of propitiation also for those who have in any wise wronged, grieved, or abused me, or have done me damage or caused me displeasure. And for all those likewise whom I have at any time grieved, troubled, wronged, or scandalized by words or deeds, knowingly or unknowingly; that it may please Thee to forgive us all our sins and offences one against another. Take, O Lord, from our hearts all jealousy, indignation, wrath, and contention, and whatsoever may hurt charity or lessen brotherly love." To pray thus wins the love of Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament veiled to us by the sacramental species. The more we are able to make our hearts like the Heart of our dear Saviour, the more worthy we become of this august Sacrament. The more genuine our forgiveness and love for our enemies and for those who have wronged us, the more intense is the love of the hidden Saviour for us.

It may be no easy matter to forgive those who have actually wronged us, or who we think have wronged us, but the more generous our sentiments towards them, the more our hearts are made like to the model given us by the forgiving Heart of Jesus, the more worthy we make ourselves to approach Him who has loved men with such a love that He was constrained to pray for them at the very time of their

devil. "Leave not Holy Communion for every small trouble and vexation, but go quickly to confession, and willingly forgive others their offences against thee." When there is real reason for anxiety and scruple, seek out your confessor without delay and open your conscience to him. Having heard his advice, act in accordance with it, and receive Holy Communion as a sacrifice of propitiation if you have done wrong, or as a means to overcome your scruples in case your anxiety was unfounded.

Be not like some dissolute people who "are willing to put off confession and desire that their Holy Communion should be deferred, lest they should be obliged to keep a stricter watch over themselves." To omit Holy Communion because of scrupulosity, even after receiving the Sacrament of Penance is no uncommon fault. There is an exaggerated conception of the requirements for a worthy Communion. Whereas there should be a frank acknowledgment of man's impossibility to be worthy to receive Holy Communion yet Holy Communion should not be omitted for this reason; with an abandonment of one's self to God's infinite goodness and mercy, an endless regret and an anxious activity to reach a purity of soul and a worthiness which is unattainable should be put aside and Holy Communion humbly received. It is by far better to receive Holy Communion as often as our daily duties allow, and trust to each Holy Communion to make us less unworthy because of the graces of Him who comes to us.

Resolve to "put away all anxiety and scruple; for it hinders the grace of God and destroys devotion."

Conclusion: "O Lord, for Thy great mercy's sake, grant me to approach Thy holy mysteries with a clean heart and a pure mind." (*Missal,* Preparation for Holy Mass).

DECEMBER 24

NO DEVOTION

Another excuse for putting off Holy Communion is because there is no devotion experienced in its reception. As a matter of fact, to omit Holy Communion on this account does not remedy the defect, but rather increases it. Holy Communion is a matter not of sentiment, but of faith. Although sensible devotion is an aid and incentive to the frequent reception of this Sacrament, yet the repeated receiving of it without such devotion through no fault of ours, is even more meritorious. Besides, "it is very hurtful to defer Communion long; for this usually causes a great lukewarmness and numbness."

In experiencing a sweet devotion, we already have a share of our reward; when, however, we are deprived of these sensible delights through no culpable negligence on our part, then is our reward reserved for Heaven.

Often a lack of sensible devotion is owing to the haste and want of seriousness with which this great Sacrament is received. Haste is a dissipator of devotion. "Let all things be done decently, and according to order" (1 Cor. XIV, 40). A reasonable time spent in preparation, and a certain serious realization of what we are about to do, contribute much to peace of mind and devotion. Having done our share, let us leave the rest to God, aiming rather at His praise and honor than at our own comfort. Many persons falsely imagine that the spiritual exercises which they perform without relish, tenderness of heart, or sensible satisfaction are less agreeable to His Divine Majesty. Our actions are like roses, which have more beauty when fresh, but more strength and sweetness

when dry. Our works, when performed with tenderness of heart, are more agreeable to ourselves, who regard only our own satisfaction; however, when performed in a time of dryness, they possess more sweetness and are more precious in the sight of God. In the time of dryness our will forces us to serve God, as it were, by violence; and consequently, and necessarily it must be more vigorous and constant than in the time of consolation."

Resolve to receive Holy Communion in spite a lack of sensible devotion.

Conclusion: "Turn to us, O Lord, for a little space."

DECEMBER 25

FAITH

With what devotion would we not receive Holy Communion if, like Magdalen, we could first bewail our sins at the feet of Christ, and, like St. John the Evangelist, be received into His tender loving embrace! Although we may not realize it, this affection of Christ for the soul may nevertheless be experienced in the Sacrament of His love, for He is as truly present and as truly loving as though we knelt at His feet or rested upon His breast. It is true that He is hidden under the sacramental species of bread and wine. To have the belief that after the words of consecration no longer bread and wine but the body and blood of Jesus Christ are present, faith is necessary. What appears to the senses as bread and wine is known by faith to be no more bread and wine, but the real and living Christ.

How can anyone believe this statement? We believe it on the word of Jesus, the God-man, Himself. Faith means to accept as true the word of some one who is not deceitful nor

liable to error. Theological faith is to accept as true the word of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Once we believe there is a God, what is more reasonable than that we should believe His word? Now Christ, taking bread in His adorable hands, said, "This is My body," and taking the chalice with wine in it, said, "This is My blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many." (Mark XIV, 24). There can be no words plainer than these. It ought not to be difficult for us, therefore, to give our firm adhesion to the truth embodied in the belief in the Blessed Sacrament. Christ is God; He has spoken; He cannot deceive. Hence, "I truly have Him whom the angels adore in Heaven; I, as yet, in faith; they, by sight and without a veil. I must be content with the light of true faith, and walk therein till the day of eternal brightness breaks forth and the shades of figures pass away."

Resolution: "I will walk in faith, strengthened by the examples of Thy saints."

Conclusion: "O God, because Thou hast said it, I believe that I will receive the Sacred Body of Jesus Christ to eat and His precious Blood to drink."

DECEMBER 26

THANKSGIVING AFTER HOLY COMMUNION

The obligation of giving thanks to our Blessed Saviour for the great grace of Holy Communion, looms up so conspicuously as a demand of what is proper and becoming, that the time and prayers commonly used after Communion are usually known and termed, "Thanksgiving after Communion." Our dear Lord may rightfully say to you: "It is of My

mere goodness and grace that thou art suffered to come to My table; as if a beggar should be invited to dinner by a rich man, who hath nothing else to return him for his benefits, but to humble himself and to give him thanks."

It is but fitting, then, that some time be spent after each Holy Communion in prayer and thanksgiving. When the soul enjoys sensible devotion, such thanksgiving is an easy matter. There is a spiritual pleasure connected with its very performance. But when this devotion is lacking, then there is an inclination to be negligent in this duty, quickly to forget our reception of the Eucharistic Lord, and hurriedly to delve again into the business and occupations of the world. "When I bestow the grace of devotion, give thanks to Thy God, not for that thou art worthy, but because I have had mercy on thee. If thou hast it not and findest thyself dry, continue in prayer, sigh and knock at the gate of divine mercy, and give it not over till thou receivest some crumb of divine grace."

No matter what the state of our soul may be, whether a blissful calm or a confused apathy, if the immensity of this favor does not move our hearts to fervent thanksgiving, then we must force ourselves, despite our disinclination, to spend a reasonable time in thanking God for His goodness. As a result, a sweet fervor is often experienced before we leave off with prayer; or if this sweetness should not be ours, faith tells us that we have by our efforts pleased God and gained merit for Heaven.

Resolve to be exact in offering Jesus a suitable thanksgiving after Holy Communion.

Conclusion: "My good Jesus, I thank Thee with all my heart. How good, how kind Thou art to me, sweet Jesus! Blessed be Jesus in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar." (Prayer after Communion).

DECEMBER 27

THANKSGIVING CONTINUED

Some prepare themselves well for Holy Communion, but do not continue their devotion after having received the Blessed Sacrament. Yet careful guarding of oneself after Communion is no less required than devout preparation before. "For what renders a man very much indisposed is, if he presently turns himself to exterior comforts. Beware of much talk, remain in secret, and enjoy thy God; for thou hast Him whom all the world cannot take away from thee." After Holy Communion I may truly say in the words of the Apostle: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. II, 20). I to be mindful of His presence, and make the most of His being in me as long as the sacramental species remain incorrupt. How much there is to say, how much to request, how much to admire, to thank for, to ask forgiveness for! How propitious a time is this to promise Him fidelity, loyalty, and love!

It ought not to be a difficult task to remain recollected during the time immediately following Holy Communion, nay during the whole of the blessed day. The remembrance of His visit ought often to recur to us, and what is more natural than that upon such a thought a word of thanksgiving be again spoken to Him for His loving kindness. A good thanksgiving after the reception of this august Sacrament is the best preparation for greater graces. There is danger of curtailing our thanksgiving, especially if it be not accompanied by sensible devotion. Nothing is more unwise. The most precious moments of our lives are those which im-

mediately follow Holy Communion. Thoughtlessly to let these slip by, without utilizing them to their fullest extent, is a distinct loss to our spiritual life.

Resolve to thank God earnestly for each Holy Communion.

Conclusion: "Sweet Jesus, I am going away for a time, but I trust not without You. You are with me with Your grace. I will never leave You by mortal sin. I do not fear to do so, though I am so weak, because I have such hope in You. Give me grace to persevere. Amen." (Prayer after Holy Communion).

DECEMBER 28

HOLY COMMUNION A GREAT PRIVILEGE

"Surely there is no other nation so great, that hath their God so nigh to them, as Thou, our God, art present to Thy faithful." Thus we read in *The Following of Christ*. It is but a paraphrase of a similar statement in Holy Scripture (Deut. IV, 7). This truth follows from the omnipresence of God, but is even more striking in reference to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. "For what nation is so honored as the Christian people, or what creature under heaven so beloved as a devout soul into whom God cometh, that He may feed her with His glorious flesh?"

What a privilege to associate with God on terms of intimate friendship! What a holy audacity to speak to Him so intimately, yet He permits and desires it. We may address Him and say: "Who will give me, O Lord, to find Thee alone, that I may open my whole heart to Thee, as my soul desireth; no one beholding me, or at all affecting me; but Thou

alone speaking to me, and I to Thee; as the loved one is wont to speak to the beloved, and a friend to entertain himself with his friend." Ordinarily, the higher one's position in life, the more difficult he is of approach by the poor and lowly. Customs and conventions hedge him in, and often, despite the feelings and goodness of the one in high position, there is no friendly intercourse between him and those of lower rank. How condescending on the part of God, who is in the highest position and above the customs and conventions of man, to come into the hearts of His servants and to delight to be in their midst! "What return shall I make to the Lord for this grace, for such extraordinary charity? There is nothing that I can give Him that will please Him better than if I give up my heart entirely to Him, and unite it closely to him."

Resolution: "This is my whole desire, that my heart be united to Thee."

Conclusion: "Sweet Jesus, I desire with all my heart to receive Thee. Most sweet Jesus, come into my soul and give me Thy Flesh to eat and Thy Blood to drink. Give me Thy whole self, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, that I may live entirely with Thee." (Prayer before Holy Communion).

DECEMBER 29

DEVOTION

The fervent devotion and evident sweetness enjoyed by many in the reception of Holy Communion are often envied by those who do not experience similar sentiments. It must be remembered that such devotion and spiritual joy are not so much the result of man's own efforts as the gift of Jesus.

To obtain them we must beg our divine Guest for them. Often ought we to pray: "Be Thou merciful to me, O good Jesus, sweet and gracious Lord; and grant me, Thy poor supplicant, to feel sometimes at least, in Holy Communion, a little bit of the cordial affection of Thy love, so that my faith may be strengthened, my hope in Thy goodness increased, and my charity, being once perfectly enkindled, and having tasted the Manna of Heaven, may never decay."

Prayer, an ardent desire for devotion, and the fire of God's love will win this divine favor for us. "Thy mercy is able to give me the grace I desire, and to visit me in Thy great clemency with the spirit of fervor, when it shall please Thee; for though I burn not at present with so great desire as those who are so singularly devoted to Thee, yet by Thy grace, I desire to have this same greatly inflamed desire; praying and wishing that I may be made partaker with all such Thy fervent lovers, and numbered in their Holy Communion." Thus praying and longing for the divine favor, I will be able to experience "how great is the abundance of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast laid up for those who fear Thee" (Ps. XXX, 20). When devotion and affection are far from me, I will redouble my prayers and continue to receive Thee, seeking by gentle force to move Thee to compassion for my misery, to the end that Thou wilt hear me and bless me with Thy sweet consolation and joy, who am so desirous of tasting the sweetness of union with Thee.

Resolve to persevere in the desire for a sweet union with Jesus.

Conclusion: "Sweet Jesus, I love Thee; I love Thee with all my heart. Thou knowest that I love Thee and wish to love Thee daily more and more." (Prayer after Holy Communion).

DECEMBER 30

CONFIDENCE IN JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Our whole confidence ought to be put in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, both for eternal salvation and for the gaining of perfection in the spiritual life here upon earth. Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament knows us and has us always in mind. From our parish church, or from the tabernacle nearest our home or place of business, He is conscious of our presence; He protects us and grieves for our offences. He knows the evils and vices in which we are immersed, how often we are oppressed, tempted, troubled, and defiled. Anticipating our needs, He sends forth His graces to aid us; at other times awaiting our request for help, He is eager to help and comfort us, and forgive our offences. In His sacred vigil in the tabernacle, He tenderly and slowly works upon our souls, moving us to see the nothingness of the things of this world, and developing in us gradually a taste for higher things.

These are Christ's sentiments towards us, ever friendly and helpful to our spiritual advantage. Knowing these facts, what confidence ought they not to arouse in our souls, and even when loaded with sin and imperfections, what courage ought they inspire to make us start in striving for perfection. Enjoying His friendship and favor as we do, should we not be prompted to persevere and to advance in sanctity? No state of our soul, no mood of our mind is without His sympathy. Ever waiting, always present in this holy Sacrament, He is ready and eager to be our confidant and our bounteous benefactor.

What a treasure we have in Jesus on the altar! Could we but make Him the central thought of our lives, and by constantly reverting to Him and frequently receiving Him in Holy Communion, make Him the one worth-while object of our existence. Such an endeavor would be worthy of our entire striving in this life, and the result would be an inestimable sanctity. Happy the man to whom the Blessed Sacrament is his all!

Resolve to place all your confidence in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Conclusion: "O Jesus, may I live a good life; may I die a happy death; may I receive Thee before I die." (Prayer after Holy Communion).

DECEMBER 31

CHRIST THE KING

As a final act of a year's meditations, there is scarcely anything more befitting than to enthrone Jesus as the King of our hearts. We have learned to know His divine attributes, His just prerogatives, and His unspeakable love for us. What more appropriate than that we should proclaim Him our Ruler in all things without reserve, in secular as well as in spiritual matters? Our promised fealty to Him will be a continual source of joy and confidence for us. Gladly may we subject ourselves entirely to this holy Master, for to be the slave of Christ is to enjoy the sweetest freedom. What joy fills the heart when one is able to say: "No, I am no more my own; whether I live or die, I am my Saviour's. I have no more anything of me or mine; my me is Jesus, and my mine is to be wholly His." (*The Devout Life,* p. 359). His holy law is our guide of conduct, His passion and death

is our strength and hope, His love our consolation and ample reward.

It is a condescension on the part of Jesus to allow us to enlist in His service; our fidelity and loyalty will prove how much we appreciate this favor and honor of serving the King. Some give Him a divided allegiance, acknowledging Him as Ruler in spiritual affairs, but allowing Him no say in worldly concerns. In the realms of business, politics, and society, Jesus the King is ignored. This should not be. Our King must rule our whole lives, no matter in what sphere we may move. Christ the King must always be before our eyes, His laws must be respected, His wishes must be attained, His honor and glory must be magnified, His love for men must be extolled and spread to a wider circle of participants. Unless Christ is the King of our whole being, body and soul, heart and intellect, sentiment and will, we do Him scant honor. Our loyalty must be whole-hearted, all-embracing, unconditional, and unreservedly generous.

Resolution: Jesus Christ, true God and true man, Thou art my King in all things, without reserve.

Conclusion: "My God and my all!"

THE END

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